

THE EMERGENCE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY IN PATRISTIC  
TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY  
ORIGEN AND THE DISTINCTIVE SHAPE OF THE ANTE-NICENE  
*STATUS QUÆSTIONIS*

Pui Him Ip  
Magdalene College  
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*For Natasha*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### Series

ACW Ancient Christian Writers

CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina

FoC Fathers of the Church

GCS Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller

LCL Loeb Classical Library

PG Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca

SC Sources chrétiennes

### Bible Abbreviations (Old Testament)

Genesis – Gen

Leviticus – Lev

Deuteronomy – Deut

Judges – Judg

1 Samuel – 1 Sam

1 Kings – 1 Kings

1 Chronicles – 1 Chr

Ezra – Ezra

Tobit – Tob

Esther – Esth 1

2 Maccabees – 2 Macc

Psalms – Ps

Ecclesiastes – Eccl

Canticles – Cant

Sirach – Sir

Jeremiah – Jer

Baruch – Bar

Daniel – Dan

Joel – Joel

Jonah – Jon

Exodus – Ex

Numbers – Num

Joshua – Josh

Ruth – Ruth

2 Samuel – 2 Sam

2 Kings – 2 Kings

2 Chronicles – 2 Chr

Nehemiah – Neh

Judith – Jdt

Maccabees – 1 Macc

Job – Job

Proverbs – Prov

Song of Solomon – Song

Wisdom – Wis

Isaiah – Isa

Lamentations – Lam

Ezekial – Ezek

Hosea – Hos

Amos – Am

Micah – Mic



Nahum – Nah

Zephaniah – Zeph

Zechariah – Zech

Habakkuk – Hab

Haggai – Hag

Malachi – Mal

### **Bible Abbreviations (New Testament)**

Matthew – Mt

Luke – Lk

Acts of the Apostles – Acts

1 Corinthians – 1 Cor

Galatians – Gal

Philippians – Phil

1 Thessalonians – 1 Thess

1 Timothy – 1 Tim

Titus – Titus

Hebrews – Heb

1 Peter – 1 Pet

1 John – 1 Jn

3 John – 3 Jn

Revelation – Rev

Mark – Mk

John – Jn

Romans – Rom

2 Corinthians – 2 Cor

Ephesians – Eph

Colossians – Col

2 Thessalonians – 2 Thess

2 Timothy – 2 Tim

Philemon – Philemon

James – Jas

2 Peter – 2 Pet

2 John – 2 Jn

Jude – Jude

Abbreviations for primary sources can be found in the bibliography.

## INTRODUCTION

*Et haec trinitas unus est Deus; nec ideo non simplex, quia trinitas.*<sup>1</sup>

(St Augustine)

‘the contrast between...simplicity of the divine essence, which excludes all distinctions from God, and the doctrine of the Trinity, which it is still hoped to retain, needs simple mention.’<sup>2</sup>

(Isaak Dorner)

Can God be simple and Triune? This study proposes to go back to the very beginning – the ante-Nicene developments culminating in the theology of Origen – and traces the first steps of how divine simplicity entered Christian Trinitarian discourse. The emphasis on the *ante-Nicene* development is not a coincidence. The fundamental outlook of this study is that divine simplicity emerged in the ante-Nicene period with a distinctive *status quaestionis* concerning both the meaning of simplicity, and the function of divine simplicity in reflections on the ‘Trinitarian’ relation.<sup>3</sup> That divine simplicity emerged in the ante-Nicene period is not itself a novel thesis. That there are unique formulations of divine simplicity in this period is also recognised by a few scholars. However, what is hitherto unexplored, and what this study attempts to establish, is that in ante-Nicene theology the development of divine simplicity discourse and its function in Trinitarian theology had a distinctive shape. This study contends that the distinctive shape of ante-Nicene developments raise new questions for the two fields of inquiry where the simple Trinity has been examined in detail: first, for patristic specialists who are interested in the historical emergence of divine simplicity as a pillar of fourth century Trinitarian theology, and second for contemporary systematic and philosophical theologians who are engaged in re-thinking the simple Trinity today. So to begin our inquiry, we first need to sketch out how the simple Trinity has gained substantial attentions in patristics, and systematic/philosophical theology.

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<sup>1</sup> *Civ.* XI.10

<sup>2</sup> I. A. Dorner, *A System of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Alfred Cave and John S. Banks, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), 195.

<sup>3</sup> In this period, the specific relation that received substantial theological attention is the Father-Son relation. Hence for the remainder of the study, unless otherwise stated, by ‘Trinitarian’ relation I refer primarily to the Father-Son relation.

## SIMPLICITY AND TRINITY IN PRO-NICENE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

The idea that God is a simple Trinity has a long historical pedigree in Christian theology. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 affirmed in the first Canon that God's nature is absolutely simple (*simplex omnino*). This affirmation is placed alongside the confession of God as triune: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Lateran IV confession of God as absolutely simple *and* triune summarises the consensus of the Christian tradition before it. As our opening quotation from Augustine makes it clear, from the classical standpoint God's simplicity in no way compromises his Trinity. A brief look at Augustine's theology will make this point clear.

In *Civ.* XI.10, Augustine argues that God's attributes are identical to God himself. God is he who alone is simple, which for Augustine means that 'God is what he has'. God is not called 'good' because he *possesses* goodness as part of his being. Rather, God is called 'good' because he *is* goodness himself. This is just one way of saying that we may not imagine God to be a composite of attributes that are accidental to his being. If this is the case, then the divine attributes – goodness, life, wisdom, etc. – are said to be *identical* to God himself. Moreover, divine simplicity means that there can be no objective distinctions between the distinct attributes such as goodness, life, wisdom, etc. Augustine expresses this point clearly in *De Trinitate*:

God however is indeed called in multiple ways great, good, wise, blessed, true, and anything else that seems not to be unworthy of him; but his greatness is identical with his wisdom (he is not great in mass but in might), and his goodness is identical with his wisdom and greatness, and his truth is identical with them all; and with him being blessed is not one thing, and being great or wise or true or good, or just simply being, another.<sup>4</sup>

Augustine argues here that due to divine simplicity, all divine attributes possess an ultimate unity in God such that they are *identical to one another*. So in the Augustinian perspective, divine simplicity seems to forbid one to hold any distinctions between God and his attributes, and between two different attributes.

But alongside his exposition of divine simplicity, Augustine insists that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – he is Trinity. As Augustine points out in *Civ.* XI.10, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are properly distinct from one another. It is not that one person of the Trinity alone is simple and the others are composite. Rather, the Trinity itself is simple. Moreover, Augustine

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<sup>4</sup> *De Trin.* VI. 8.

insists that contrary to the Sabellian heresy that asserts God as only nominally a Trinity, Christian Orthodoxy affirms that God is properly understood only as Trinity: ‘we say it [e.g. the Trinity] is simple, because it is what it has, with the exception of the relation of the persons to one another.’ Thus for Augustine, the Christian God must be a simple Trinity – a God who possesses no distinctions in himself with respect to his attributes and yet at the same time, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The idea of the simple Trinity is not unique to Augustine’s theology. Rather, the doctrine occupies a central role in patristic theology. This has been noted long ago.<sup>5</sup> But it is only until recently that scholars have begun to examine in detail the centrality of divine simplicity in patristic Trinitarian theology. Recent patristic scholarship highlights that divine simplicity is a central category in pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology, Greek and Latin.<sup>6</sup> While pro-Nicene theologians do not always define the idea of simplicity with great precision, nevertheless recent scholarship has established a useful way for characterising the affirmation of divine simplicity in fourth century Trinitarian theology. According to Lewis Ayres, for the pro-Nicenes, divine simplicity is a fundamental strategy for reflection ‘on the paradox of the irreducible unity of the three irreducible divine persons’.<sup>7</sup> By calling divine simplicity a ‘strategy’, what Ayres means is that simplicity serves a role that is analogous to grammatical rules in language. Just as the rule of non-contradiction regulates the logic of linguistic discourse, so divine simplicity serves as a rule to regulate the ‘theo-logic’ – the theological appropriateness – of a given theological discourse. For example, in an illuminating work, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz has demonstrated how divine simplicity works as a ‘grammatical rule’ in the context of scriptural interpretation.<sup>8</sup> When early Christian exegetes identify the speaking subject in a particular Scriptural text, divine simplicity serves as one important principle to regulate this hermeneutical decision. Furthermore, Radde-Gallwitz has shown that in this ‘grammatical’ role, simplicity can be put into multiple

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<sup>5</sup> G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: S.P.C.K, 1952), 9–13; G. C. Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 90–7; 180–9; G. C. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 120–35; G. C. Stead, “Divine Simplicity as a Problem for Orthodoxy,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays In Honour Of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 255–69.

<sup>6</sup> See Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and the Transformation of Divine Simplicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 278.

<sup>8</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, 19–37.

contradictory uses depending on one's theological assumptions.<sup>9</sup> In the context of theological epistemology, some like Clement of Alexandria have utilised simplicity to develop a radical apophaticism, namely, that it is impossible to know God at all.<sup>10</sup> Others, like Eunomius, have utilised simplicity to argue that to know God is to know his essence.<sup>11</sup> Still others, like the Cappadocian brothers Basil and Gregory, have utilised simplicity to set out a *via media* between the two, namely, to hold together the possibility and limitation of human knowledge of God.<sup>12</sup> The recent works of Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz have significantly clarified the status of divine simplicity in patristic theology on two significant fronts. First, divine simplicity must be regarded as a central theological category across all participants in fourth century Trinitarian debates. Second, the majority of fourth century theologians utilised divine simplicity almost as a methodological presupposition – a 'grammatical rule' – in their theological discourse.

While recent patristic scholarship has advanced new models to explain the centrality of divine simplicity in pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology, in my view, significant questions remain unaddressed. First, neither divine simplicity nor Trinitarian theology emerged in the fourth century from a vacuum.<sup>13</sup> Rather, as will become apparent in the course of this study, divine simplicity emerged in ante-Nicene Trinitarian discourse within a doctrinal-polemical landscape that is not identical to the one in the fourth century. As a result, a full but isolated account of the *status quaestionis* in the fourth century will paint an incomplete picture. To gain a better understanding of the centrality of simplicity for fourth century Trinitarian theology, we will need to ask further questions: how did divine simplicity emerge in *ante*-Nicene Trinitarian discourse? How was simplicity understood and what role did it play in shaping ante-Nicene Trinitarian reflections? Moreover, did the *status quaestionis* develop from the ante-Nicene to the post-Nicene period? If so, how do we account for this transition? These questions are not currently well understood but they are indispensable for understanding of why (and how) divine simplicity became a centrepiece to the fourth century pro-Nicene theological outlook. Secondly, as Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz have shown, in patristic theology, the theological significance of divine

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<sup>9</sup> See Lewis Ayres and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Doctrine of God," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 874–75 for a short summary.

<sup>10</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, 38–59.

<sup>11</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, 96–112.

<sup>12</sup> Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, chaps. 5–7.

<sup>13</sup> Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz themselves recognise this point: "By the time pro-Nicene theology emerged, Christians had for centuries been speaking of God as simple." Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz, "Doctrine of God," 874.

simplicity is found primarily in its ‘grammatical’ function. But it remains an open question as to whether simplicity has acquired a specific ‘grammatical’ function in patristic theology for thinking about the nature of Trinitarian relations. Did simplicity play a role in shaping the patristic conception of the Father-Son relation? If so, what were the doctrinal-polemical contexts in which divine simplicity acquired a specific Trinitarian function? These issues are not currently well understood in patristic scholarship because the *status quaestionis* in the ante-Nicene period is overlooked. Consequently, we are left with an incomplete account of how divine simplicity became a central category in patristic Trinitarian theology.

#### SIMPLICITY AND TRINITY: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN CONSENSUS

Given that the simple Trinity is central to pro-Nicene theology, how do we understand the content of this double affirmation? Might the notion of divine simplicity pose any problems to the affirmation of the Trinity? The force behind these questions might not be apparent in the writings of the fourth century, but it is now keenly felt by modern theologians. A *Rezeptionsgeschichte* will reveal how far the pre-modern consensus on the simple Trinity has collapsed in modern systematic and philosophical theology.<sup>14</sup>

‘And this is a dark saying indeed.’<sup>15</sup> Alvin Plantinga’s statement provides a concise summary of how divine simplicity is commonly perceived today. Many discover in the doctrine nothing but the basic idea that ‘no distinctions can be made in God.’<sup>16</sup> As early as Isaak August Dorner (1809-1884) in the nineteenth century, we already find the judgement that ‘all distinctions in God are expunged as objective existences’ due to Augustine’s doctrine of divine simplicity in *De Trinitate* VI.7.<sup>17</sup> Since divine simplicity allows no internal distinctions in God, everything in God is identical to each other because ‘what is without distinction is identical.’ From this reasoning – call it the identity thesis – it follows that divine simplicity implies the identity between God’s knowing and willing, an ‘identity’ which generates many grave theological conclusions. On this reading, it is no surprise that for Dorner simplicity brings about a notion of divine unity in which ‘all difference becomes swallowed up.’<sup>18</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014),

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<sup>14</sup> It has been observed by Stephen Holmes that the shifting of consensus regarding divine simplicity is part of a wider trend in the doctrine of God in modern theology. See Stephen Holmes, “The Attributes of God,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Bainbridge Webster and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 54–71.

<sup>15</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980), 27.

<sup>16</sup> Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Dorner, *System*, 1:195.

<sup>18</sup> Dorner, *System*, 1:197.

commenting on Augustine again, arrives at a similar conclusion. Pannenberg finds in Augustine's doctrine of divine simplicity an attempt to define the unity of the divine substance 'in such a way as to rule out any idea of substantial distinction'.<sup>19</sup> More recently Robert Jenson (1930-2017) rehearses the same view that in Augustine divine simplicity expresses nothing but the view 'that no sort of self-differentiation can really be true of him [God]'.<sup>20</sup> Thus a consensus emerges in modern theology: divine simplicity as found in classical Christian Theology,<sup>21</sup> primarily in Augustine, refers to a purely metaphysical notion of the divine nature which rules out all distinctions or differences in God.

But if divine simplicity is taken thus, what are the theological implications? Modern commentators highlight one obvious problem: divine simplicity appears to be in conflict with the doctrine of the Trinity. Whereas the compatibility between simplicity and Trinity needed no further elaboration for Augustine, the opposite is true for modern theologians, as our second opening quote by Dorner summarises well.<sup>22</sup> For Dorner, and many others, the incompatibility between simplicity and Trinity seems obvious: if God is utterly simple, meaning that all distinctions are ruled out in God, how then could there be any distinctions between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Pannenberg argues that Augustine was committed to divine simplicity 'even at the cost of making the differentiation of the three persons in God an impenetrable secret'.<sup>23</sup> What Pannenberg is hinting at here is that Augustine's commitment to simplicity ultimately leads to a lack of clarity regarding whether we can really speak of the three divine persons as distinct. In line with Pannenberg's judgment, Jenson argues that Augustine's theology fails to affirm the Trinitarian distinctions because of his commitment to divine simplicity: 'Moreover, he [Augustine] did not notice that Nicaea asserts eventful differentiation in God. The reason he did not is apparent...unquestioning commitment to the axiom of his antecedent Platonic theology, that God is metaphysically "simple," that no sort of self-differentiation can really be true of him.'<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of modern systematic theologians, Augustine's statement '*Et haec*

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<sup>19</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (S.L.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 283.

<sup>20</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, vol. 1 (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 111.

<sup>21</sup> This qualification is necessary because some modern theologians have indeed attempted to re-interpret divine simplicity. For example, Karl Barth attempted to interpret simplicity as 'faithfulness' of God. The scholarly consensus is thus concerning the understanding of simplicity found in the classical Christian tradition.

<sup>22</sup> Dorner, *System*, 1:195.

<sup>23</sup> Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:283.

<sup>24</sup> Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:111.

*trinitas unus est Deus; nec ideo non simplex, quia trinitas*’ appears less as a piece of profound reflection on the mystery of the divine life, and more as a sign of the problematic tension in classical theology.

Recently, the potential incompatibility between simplicity and Trinity is given a more precise formulation by philosophical theologians: it seems that divine simplicity leads to a *logical* incompatibility with Trinitarian distinctions. William Lane Craig, commenting on the post-Nicene creeds, explains this ‘logical problem’:

...it must be admitted that a number of post-Nicene creeds, probably under the influence of the doctrine of divine simplicity, do include statements which can be construed to identify each person of the Trinity with God as a whole. For example, the Eleventh Council of Toledo (675) affirms, “Each single person is wholly God in Himself,” the so-called Athanasian Creed (eighth century) enjoins Christians “to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord,” and the Fourth Lateran Council, in condemning the idea of a divine Quaternity, declares, “each of the Persons is that reality, viz., that divine substance, essence, or nature....what the Father is, this very same reality is also the Son, this the Holy Spirit.” *If these declarations are intended to imply that statements like “The Father is God” are identity statements, then they threaten the doctrine of the Trinity with logical incoherence.* For the logic of identity requires that if the Father is identical with God and the Son is identical with God, then the Father is identical with the Son, which the same Councils also deny.<sup>25</sup>

Craig’s analysis is representative of how contemporary philosophical theologians approach the potential incompatibility between the Trinity and divine simplicity.<sup>26</sup> If the lack of distinctions in God leads to various ‘identities’ being posited, then we are left with the following logic:

- (1) All that is distinct in God must be identical to the same reality due to divine simplicity
- (2) God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct

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<sup>25</sup> William Lane Craig, “Towards a Tenable Social Trinitarianism,” in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, ed. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (Oxford ; New York: OUP Oxford, 2009), 94. Italics mine.

<sup>26</sup> For another similar analysis on the basis of the notion of “identity” in modern logic, see William Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 55–61; See also the summaries in James E. Dolezal, “Trinity, Simplicity and the Status of God’s Personal Relations,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 16, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 79–98; Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity: A Dogmatic Account* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 40–41, 207–11.



- (3) (a) 'The Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be identical to each other, and (b) each divine person must be identical to the Godhead as a whole

If the above logic is correct, then it is indeed difficult to see how divine simplicity and a Trinitarian notion of God could hold together in a coherent manner.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, this analysis raises the suspicion that by affirming divine simplicity, classical Trinitarian theology is ultimately unable to accommodate the affirmation of Trinitarian distinctions.<sup>28</sup> The sentiment underlying contemporary philosophical analyses is summed up well by Christopher Stead (1913-2008), who concludes that the classical affirmation of divine simplicity seems to lead inevitably to an understanding of God that is 'totally unrelated to the Trinity of Persons in which we believe it [divine simplicity] is deployed'.<sup>29</sup>

This brief *Rezeptionsgeschichte* illustrates how with respect to the doctrine of the simple Trinity, a modern consensus has developed in place of the classical one. While Augustine and Lateran IV could affirm simplicity and Trinity in a single sentence, the two doctrines now sit uneasily alongside each other in the modern theological landscape. Given that the doctrine of the simple Trinity emerged in the patristic period, a critical assessment of the doctrine surely requires detailed engagements with patristic developments. However, contemporary systematic and philosophical theologians who are currently engaged in critical reassessment of the simple Trinity tend to focus exclusively on post-Nicene theology in isolation. As we have seen, the figure who received the most attention from systematic/philosophical theologians is Augustine, but others such as Gregory of Nyssa have received some attention as well.<sup>30</sup> This historiographical imbalance has led modern debates on the simple Trinity to be based on isolated reading of the post-Nicene *status quaestionis*, disconnected from its ante-Nicene background. This isolated focus

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<sup>27</sup> Christopher Stead writes: "But...it would appear that the concept of divine simplicity was adopted too readily by some Christian writers who did not pause to consider its implications. Thus we find Athanasius arguing that God, being perfectly simple, cannot possess a multiplicity of accidents; but it is not clear why the same argument should not be used to exclude a diversity of divine characteristics (which Athanasius upheld), or even a trinity of persons." Stead, *Divine Substance*, 187. Stead's point captures the heart of the problem observed by modern theologians: if divine simplicity is used to rule out the proper distinct realities of the attributes, why not the distinction between the Trinitarian persons as well?

<sup>28</sup> See Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 241–42; Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:283.

<sup>29</sup> Stead, "Divine Simplicity," 266.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Cross, "Divine Simplicity and the Doctrine of the Trinity: Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine," in *Philosophical Theology and the Christian Tradition: Russian and Western Perspectives*, ed. David Bradshaw (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), 53–66; Thomas McCall, "Trinity Doctrine, Plain and Simple," in *Advancing Trinitarian Theology*, ed. Fred Sanders and Oliver D. Crisp (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014), 42–59.

is problematic because as this study will suggest, ante-Nicene developments raise substantial theological questions on the simple Trinity that are hitherto unknown in contemporary debates. For example, as I shall argue in part II of this study, ante-Nicene developments will challenge the analysis of the incompatibility between simplicity and Trinity in modern debates. Consequently, the isolated focus on 4<sup>th</sup> century figures hinders further clarity arising in the contemporary debates, depriving them of some key theological insights if the ante-Nicene developments continue to remain out of sight.

## THE SHAPE OF MY ARGUMENT

From what we have seen, it is clear that the simple Trinity currently receives conflicting assessments. While patristic specialists have cemented the centrality of divine simplicity for classical Trinitarian theology, modern systematic/philosophical theologians have instead challenged the compatibility between simplicity and Trinity. Nevertheless, I have highlighted that in both fields we find the same historiographical imbalance, namely, an exclusive focus on the 4<sup>th</sup> century. The aim of this study is to redress this historiographical imbalance by offering a detailed examination of the ante-Nicene developments culminating in the most important theologian in this period, Origen of Alexandria. Origen offers an advantageous teleological vantage point for appreciating key ante-Nicene developments for three reasons. First, Origen provides the most significant vantage point to understand the transition from ante-Nicene to Nicene/post-Nicene Trinitarian debates. Selecting Origen as our termination point will enable us to compare ante- and post-Nicene developments more easily. Further, Origen's works were engaged in direct theological debates with all the significant doctrinal-polemical contexts that shaped ante-Nicene period Trinitarian theology. Lastly, as we shall see, Origen also offers arguably the richest presentation of divine simplicity in the ante-Nicene period. In light of these qualities, Origen provides an excellent termination point for appreciating the culmination of ante-Nicene developments concerning the simple Trinity.

In this study, my fundamental claim is that the ante-Nicene period possesses a distinctive *status quaestionis* concerning the simple Trinity. I shall set out my argument in two parts, with Origen functioning as a termination point in each part. In the first part, I examine the nature of divine simplicity as a doctrine in the ante-Nicene period, arguing that two trajectories of interpretations are found therein. On the first trajectory, drawing on Plato's *Republic*, divine simplicity means that (a) metaphysically God's nature is perfectly incorruptible, and (b) ethically God's character is perfectly free from contradictions. On this understanding, there is no sharp disjunction between the metaphysical and ethical sense of simplicity when it is applied to God.

Rather, divine simplicity is a synthesis between a metaphysical idea about God's *nature* and an ethical idea about God's *character*. Thus the first trajectory sets out a rich account of divine simplicity as a *metaphysical-ethical synthesis*. On the second trajectory, drawing on Plato's *Phaedo*, divine simplicity means that God is metaphysically incomposite, devoid of the possibility of dissolution. On this understanding (which is a further elaboration of the first, as I shall argue), divine simplicity is a purely metaphysical doctrine concerning God's nature. In the Greek apologists, we find that divine simplicity first emerged as a purely metaphysical doctrine, understood in line with the second trajectory. This is because the language of non-composition provides a more useful way for divine simplicity to serve as a 'grammatical rule' in the sense set out in recent scholarship. However, I argue that a richer understanding of divine simplicity as a *metaphysical-ethical synthesis* remains possible in ante-Nicene theology, as exemplified by Origen's account of divine simplicity. Origen explicitly recognises the intimate connection between the metaphysical and ethical senses of simplicity when the notion is applied to God. Consequently, in the ante-Nicene period, divine simplicity is not a monolithic concept. Rather, it could be understood either as a purely metaphysical doctrine, or as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis.

In the second part, I study the function of divine simplicity in ante-Nicene reflections on the Father-Son relation. I argue that ante-Nicene reflections on the Father-Son relation are intimately entangled with two doctrinal-polemical contexts: (a) polemic against Valentinian emanation (Latin: *prolatio*/Greek: *προβολή*) and (b) polemic against (modalist-) Monarchianism. Divine simplicity first acquired a significant role in shaping ante-Nicene accounts of the Father-Son relation in light of these contexts. On the one hand, it became relevant to reflections on the nature of the Son's generation by means of anti-Valentinian polemics. On the other hand, the Monarchian controversy highlights a possible incompatibility between divine simplicity and the affirmation of the Father-Son distinction. I argue that the emergence of divine simplicity in ante-Nicene Trinitarian discourse needs to be narrated vis-à-vis these two crucial contexts. The genius of Origen is to make use of divine simplicity in order to avoid the Monarchian *identification* between the Father and Son on the one hand, and the Valentinian *separation* between the Father and Son on the other. In light of these two polemical contexts in Origen, we shall encounter the unexpected affirmation of divine simplicity as a principle of *differentiation* as well as *unity* between the Father and Son in the ante-Nicene period.

Taking the two parts of my argument together, the ante-Nicene developments examined in this study will shed light on the historical development of patristic Trinitarian theology as well as on the simple Trinity as a theological problem. On the one hand, while the ante-Nicene

problematic only presents a particular configuration of the problem – and with it a restricted solution – nevertheless the sources examined in this study will present the crucial doctrinal and polemical background simply taken for granted by later theologians. Further, the distinctive shape of Origen’s use of divine simplicity will help clarifying the development that occurred in post-Origenian theology leading up to the fourth century, as I shall suggest in the conclusion. The excavation carried out in this study thus promises to refresh our memory – to re-familiarise us with why it was necessary to hold divine simplicity in Trinitarian theology in the first place. On the other hand, as we shall see, that there is a problem between simplicity and Trinity at all is due to the doctrinal developments in the ante-Nicene period. The surprise in store is that the original shape of the problem looks rather different from the one recognised by modern theologians. Consequently, this study will raise new theological questions for the modern debates on the nature of the simple Trinity.

## Part I:

### The Meaning of Divine Simplicity

*‘A god, then, is simple (ἀπλοῦν) and true (ἀληθὲς) in word and deed’ (Rep. 382e)*

## Divine Simplicity and Two Trajectories of Interpretation

What does it mean for God to be simple? And why must he be simple? The theological reasoning underlying the patristic affirmation of divine simplicity is a puzzling one. G.C. Stead laments that while lengthy treatments have been written on the use of ἀπλοῦς – the key Greek term for simplicity – to denote a moral virtue, little is found that explains clearly the difficult and complex doctrine of *divine* simplicity.<sup>31</sup> While the doctrine of divine simplicity cannot be restricted to simply a study of how ἀπλοῦς is applied to God, the situation described by Stead points to a deeper problem: the term ‘simple’ possesses many senses, and it is unclear which sense(s) we should consider when it comes to *divine* simplicity. As Stead has alluded to, two senses are particularly important. First, ‘simple’ possesses an *ethical* sense. He who is simple is one who is morally pure. Hence, the ethical sense is concerned with one’s *character*. Secondly, ‘simple’ possesses what we might call a *metaphysical* sense. Something is ‘simple’ in a metaphysical sense if it is ontologically basic or fundamental in contrast to other existent things. Consequently, such a ‘basic’ unit of reality must possess a sense of constancy. In contrast to the ethical sense, the metaphysical sense of simplicity is concerned with a thing’s *nature*. More sophisticated divisions are certainly available to catalogue the different senses of ‘simplicity’,<sup>32</sup> but for our purposes, I shall focus on the distinction between these two. Stead’s complaint betrays the common presupposition that divine simplicity is a rather different idea to moral simplicity, since God’s simplicity is primarily a *metaphysical* as opposed to an ethical idea. While we understand well what ἀπλοῦς means ethically, this is not the relevant sense when we come to speak of the

<sup>31</sup> Stead, “Divine Simplicity,” 256.

<sup>32</sup> See the entry for ἀπλοῦς in G.W.H. Lampe’s *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* for a survey of the different senses found in the patristic period. A notable sense of divine simplicity absent in this study is the Aristotelian concept of the simple as pure act. According to this Aristotelian sense, for God to be simple is for him to be pure actuality, having no potentiality (*dunamis*) waiting to be converted into actuality (*energeia*). *Dunamis* and *energeia* are indeed crucial for understanding third century Trinitarian theology. See Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa’s Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 94–124. However, these terms did not play a central role in the ante-Nicene discussion on divine simplicity, unlike in the case of post-Nicene accounts of divine simplicity where these technicalities became more relevant. See Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*, 159–161 (Basil), 221–224 (Gregory). Thus the Aristotelian sense of simplicity as pure act will be left out in this study due to the fact that the ante-Nicene authors made little explicit use to this technicality that became the heart of medieval discussion of divine simplicity (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Q.3).

*divine* simplicity. This attitude of favouring the metaphysical over the ethical when it comes to the meaning of divine simplicity presupposes that there is a *disjunction* between these senses in the case of God. This disjunction leads to two extreme positions. As we have seen in Stead, one extreme is to consider divine simplicity as primarily a metaphysical doctrine. According to this position, in order to interpret the meaning of divine simplicity, we need to identify the relevant *metaphysical* resources that lead to the affirmation of God being simple. Most contemporary systematic and philosophical theologians are mainly engaged in this mode of explanation.<sup>33</sup> The other extreme is to simply reject the metaphysical sense in favour of the ethical sense when it comes to defining *divine* simplicity. This second position is not frequently encountered in modern theology but was developed most famously by Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics*. Arguing against the metaphysical idea of non-composition in God as the valid basis for divine simplicity, Barth argues instead that ‘the simplicity of God consists in the trustworthiness, truthfulness and fidelity which He is Himself, and in which, therefore, He also is what He is, and does what He does.’<sup>34</sup> For Barth, ‘there is no simplicity in the Church except for the simplicity of faith in this God who is trustworthy.’<sup>35</sup> So *contra* the first extreme position, Barth argues that divine simplicity should instead be interpreted purely in an ethical fashion as a doctrine about God’s *character* – his faithful revelation of himself to his creatures. The example of Stead and Barth simply illustrates two sides of the same coin: the assumption that there is a radical disjunction between the metaphysical and the ethical. But is this disjunction valid? Is there such a sharp distinction between the metaphysical and ethical sense of ἀπλοῦς when applied to God?

I begin with this question because it is central for understanding the emergence of divine simplicity in ante-Nicene theology. Did divine simplicity emerge as (a) a purely metaphysical doctrine about the divine nature, (b) a purely ethical doctrine about God’s character, or (c) a metaphysical-ethical doctrine about both God’s nature and his character? The aim of this chapter and the next is to establish two different trajectories of interpretation in relation to divine simplicity, and to sketch out the *status quaestionis* in the ante-Nicene period with respect to these two trajectories. In the first part of this chapter, I first lay down the two trajectories by highlighting two related but distinct Platonic notions of divine simplicity. On the one hand, Plato laid down an approach to divine simplicity in *Rep.* 380d-386c that does not pose a sharp separation between the metaphysical and the ethical sense of simplicity (ἀπλοῦς). Rather, in this

<sup>33</sup> See James E. Dolezal, *God without Parts: Divine Simplicity and the Metaphysics of God’s Absoluteness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011); Duby, *Divine Simplicity*.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. Vol.2, Part 1*, ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1957), 458.

<sup>35</sup> Barth, *CD II/1*, 460–61.

passage, the two senses are closely connected together. On the other hand, Plato also developed in *Phae.* 78b-81a an influential notion of simplicity as non-composition that is indeed purely metaphysical.<sup>36</sup> I suggest that these two Platonic discussions are crucial for understanding the logic of divine simplicity in ante-Nicene theology because they provide two different ways for interpreting divine simplicity.<sup>37</sup> In the second part, I argue that one trajectory occupied a dominant place when divine simplicity first emerged in ante-Nicene theology. In the apologists, we find divine simplicity primarily as a purely metaphysical doctrine of non-composition. This is because the language of non-composition in the *Phaedo* provides a helpful tool to regulate theological discourse for various apologetic purposes.

## TWO TRAJECTORIES OF INTERPRETATION IN PLATO

### *Divine Simplicity in Plato's Republic 380d-386c*

Plato's *Rep.* 380d-386c provides an important philosophical background for understanding the meaning of divine simplicity in antiquity. To my knowledge, no one has taken the significance of this passage sufficiently seriously as a relevant background to the patristic doctrine of divine simplicity. In this passage, Socrates attempts to lay down the 'patterns for theology' (οἱ τύποι περὶ θεολογίας) in the ideal state. According to Socrates, it is necessary to select what stories about God are appropriate for the education of potential guardians of the state. Not all stories by major writers such as Homer or Hesiod teach appropriate contents to the potential guardians because these stories often depict the gods using anthropomorphic language. For Socrates, the regulating principle of selection is that 'a god must always be represented as he is' by these stories.<sup>38</sup> He laid down two laws which unpack this principle in more detail, the first of which concerns God's goodness. God is not to be portrayed as 'the cause of all things',

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<sup>36</sup> The reader should note that the distinction between ethical and metaphysical senses of simplicity in Plato is simply a useful heuristic device here. The relationship between Being and the Good for Plato is extremely complex, and Plato himself most likely would not have acknowledged the distinction between goodness and being (and similarly, between the ethical and the metaphysical) found in modern discussions of divine simplicity by scholars such as Barth or Stead. While this is the case, this distinction provides a useful device to illustrate my point that ancient discussions of divine simplicity do not always conform to the schematic assumptions underlying the modern debate.

<sup>37</sup> I am not making a genealogical claim here, suggesting that this or that author has taken the notion of divine simplicity from a specific Platonic dialogue. Rather, I am claiming that certain ante-Nicene discussions have closer *conceptual resemblance* to the discussion in the *Republic*, others to the one in the *Phaedo*. Thus it is in terms of *conceptual continuity* that I claim that there are two trajectories in ante-Nicene discussions of divine simplicity.

<sup>38</sup> *Rep.* 379a.



including what is evil. Rather, only of all that is good should be attributed to him.<sup>39</sup> Starting from *Rep.* 380d, Socrates moves on to the second law which concerns divine simplicity. He asks:

Do you think that a god is a sorcerer, able to appear in different forms at different times, sometimes changing himself from his own form into many shapes, sometimes deceiving us by making us think that he has done it? Or do you think he's simple (ἀπλοῦν) and least of all likely to step out of his own form?<sup>40</sup>

Socrates' question presents a clear contrast between two views of God. On the first account, God is depicted as being capable of appearing in multiple forms (πολλὰς μορφάς). This picture portrays a God who is changeable from one form to another, resembling the sorcerer who is able to do that to deceive his audience. On the second account, however, God is portrayed as being simple (ἀπλοῦν) and 'least of all likely to step out of his own form (τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ιδέας)'.<sup>41</sup> We can draw out three specific contrasts between the two accounts. First, there is a contrast between a God who is characterised by multiplicity of forms, and a God who is single in form. Second, there is a contrast between a God who can change into multiple forms, and a God who is incapable of such changes. Third, there is a contrast between a God who deceives, and a God who is morally pure. We thus have three emerging themes from Socrates as to what God's simplicity means: unity, immutability, and ethical purity.

As Socrates' argument for God's simplicity unfolds, we will see that the three themes are inseparably connected to each other, forming an expanded logic of what it means for God to be simple. His case for divine simplicity rests on a two-stage argument. First, Socrates proposes an argument based on the divine *nature*. He establishes that God cannot appear in multiple forms, appearing in different forms in different time, because he cannot change. According to Socrates, if God changes from one form to another, argues Socrates, then either he changes himself or he is changed by something else. The second option is rejected with the following argument:

- (1) The best things are least liable to alteration or change by something else (380e)
- (2) A god and divine realities in general are in the best condition in every way (381b)

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<sup>39</sup> *Rep.* 379b-380c.

<sup>40</sup> ἄρα γόητα τὸν θεὸν οἶε εἶναι καὶ οἷον ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς φαντάζεσθαι ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλαις ιδέαις, τοτὲ μὲν αὐτὸν γινόμενον καὶ ἀλλάττοντα τὸ αὐτοῦ εἶδος εἰς πολλὰς μορφάς, τοτὲ δὲ ἡμᾶς ἀπατῶντα καὶ ποιοῦντα περὶ αὐτοῦ τοιαῦτα δοκεῖν, ἢ ἀπλοῦν τε εἶναι καὶ πάντων ἥμισυ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ιδέας ἐκβαίνειν; (*Rep.* 380d)

<sup>41</sup> *Rep.* 380d. This first law is arguably as important for patristic theology as the second law concerning divine simplicity. Patristic reflections on creation and the origin of evil are undoubtedly regulated by this law.

(3) God is not liable to alteration or change by something else

The argument here is heavily dependent on the idea that what is most perfect admits the least change by external things. The intuition of perfection invoked here is one of permanence: what is perfect should also be permanent because if something lacks permanence, then its state of perfection is also not permanent and could be lost. Having rejected the possibility of God being changed by something else, he turns to reject the first option, namely, that God would change himself:

- (4) If God changes himself, then either he become (4a) better and more beautiful or (4b) worse and uglier
- (5) (4a) is absurd since God is perfect and lacking in nothing (381c)
- (6) (4b) is absurd since no one would deliberately make oneself worse (381c)
- (7) God would not want to change himself

This argument further elaborates what it means for God to be perfect, as found previously in the second premise of the first argument. According to Socrates, if God is perfect that it is inconceivable that God could change himself for the better since it is impossible for God to be better than he is. Thus the core idea of permanence in Socrates' notion of divine perfection does not merely lead to the implication that God cannot be changed; it also leads to the consequence that God cannot be better than who he is.

It is worth noting here that Socrates' second argument above only establishes the claim that God would not change himself. It does not establish the claim that God *cannot change himself*. This is because premise (6) above relies on the intuition – without further elaboration by Socrates – that no one *would* want deliberately to make oneself worse. Premise (6) does not state that God *could* not deliberately himself worse. It is therefore crucial to note this distinction and observe that given Socrates' commitment to premise (6), his conclusion that God cannot change entails two rather precise senses: (a) he *cannot* be changed, (b) he *would* not change himself. Consequently, according to Socrates, it is impossible for God be to changed, but it remains possible that God could change himself.<sup>42</sup>

Having established God's unity and unchangeability, Socrates then turns to the second stage of his case for divine simplicity based on God's *character*. Given that God *is* unchangeable, is it possible that he would deceive us, pretending that he is in multiple forms? In other words,

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<sup>42</sup> This point has ramifications for contemporary debates about the incompatibility between divine simplicity and divine freedom. But it lies outside the scope of this study to develop this point.

could he *appear* to be multiple in forms, even though he *is* single in form, in order to deceive us? Socrates refutes this possibility with the following argument:

- (8) If a god deceives us regarding his form, then he is willing to be false
- (9) True falsehood – to be false to one’s soul – is abhorred by all gods and humans (382a-c)
- (10) Falsehood in words in no way could bring usefulness to a god (382c-d)
- (11) The divine is in every way free from falsehoods.

This argument rests on the fact that both true falsehood and falsehood in words are absent in God. Given that God is perfect also in his *character*, he would not choose to deceive anyone regarding his *nature*. What I wish to highlight here is that God’s character as truthful – his ethical purity – is in question here in relation to the wider argument for God’s simplicity. It is after the argument for God’s ethical purity that Socrates concludes that ‘A god, then, is simple (ἀπλοῦν) and true (ἄληθές) in word and deed. He does not change himself or deceive others by images, words, or signs, whether in visions or in dreams.’<sup>43</sup> Socrates’ case for divine simplicity therefore ends not with the consideration of the divine nature alone, but with a consideration of the divine character. Taken together, the two stages of Socrates’ argument suggest that ἀπλοῦς is applied to God so that the metaphysical and the ethical senses of the term are inseparably connected. On the one hand, God’s *nature* is one without any multiplicity in form. He is so because he is unchangeable, in the sense that he could not be changed and he would not change himself. Both the intuition of singleness in form and unchangeability are central to the meaning of ἀπλοῦν in this passage. However, on the other hand, God’s *character* is one and unchangeable because of his ethical purity, meaning that he is not a deceptive and untruthful God. A God who is simple is one who is true in word and deed. So in this passage, Plato does not separate the metaphysical and the ethical sense of ἀπλοῦς when he develops the notion of *divine* simplicity. Rather, divine simplicity arises from a network of inter-connected notions (singleness in form, immutability, and ethical purity) that synthesise both metaphysical and ethical ideas about God.

It is clear, then, that Plato’s introduction of divine simplicity in *Rep.* 380d-386c supposes no disjunction between the metaphysical and the ethical senses of simplicity. In my view, this passage has paradigmatic significance for understanding divine simplicity in patristic theology. In this passage, Plato sets out divine simplicity as a ‘pattern for theology’ to rule out anthropomorphic accounts of God. This theological role assigned by Plato to divine simplicity is precisely the one found in early Christian writers, as we shall see throughout this study. It is

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<sup>43</sup> *Rep.* 382e.

worth noting that the other rule set out alongside divine simplicity in *Republic* Book 2 – that God can only be assigned as the source of goodness – is undoubtedly another pillar for early Christian theological discourse. Thus Plato’s ‘pattern for theology’ has a significant legacy on patristic theology. As a result, *Rep.* 380d-386c should be considered as a foundational background to the early Christian understanding of divine simplicity. It sets out a trajectory for interpreting divine simplicity as a synthesis between the metaphysical and ethical meanings of ἀπλοῦς.

#### *Non-composition in Plato’s Phaedo 78b-81a*

In *Rep.* 380d-386c, no reference is made to the negative sense of simplicity, namely, that God is without parts or composition. In *Phaedo* 78b-81a, Plato develops a distinction between composite and non-composite things in order to investigate whether the soul is dissoluble after death. According to Socrates, on the one hand every composite thing by nature is liable ‘to be decomposed, in the same way in which it was compounded (διαίρεθῆναι τὰυτῇ ἥπερ συνετέθη)’. On the other hand, however, only non-composite things (ἄζύνετον) are not to be decomposed.<sup>44</sup> Composites thus refer to those things which have non-permanent existence, whereas non-composites refer to those things which have permanent existence. On the basis of this distinction, we can say that non-composites are those which ‘always remain the same and in the same state’ (ἀεὶ κατὰ τὰυτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως), whereas composites are those which ‘vary from one state to another and are never the same’ (ἄλλοτ’ ἄλλως καὶ μηδέποτε κατὰ τὰυτά).<sup>45</sup> Thus the composite/non-composite distinction provides another way of expressing the contrast between self-same and changeable reality. In 79a-81a, Socrates goes further to qualify the composite/non-composite distinction: non-composites are graspable only ‘by the reasoning power of the mind’ (τῷ τῆς διανοίας λογισμῷ) whereas composites can be touched and seen and perceived by senses.<sup>46</sup> This further qualification leads him to conclude that composites belong to the visible (τὸ ὁρατόν) associated with the body whereas non-composites belong to the invisible (τὸ ἀιδέες) and incorporeal.<sup>47</sup>

It is easy to see how the composite/non-composite distinction provides a neat way of expanding the basic meaning of divine simplicity. As we have seen, divine simplicity implies that God is unchangeable – he could not be changed nor would he change himself. But if God is

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<sup>44</sup> *Phae.* 78c.

<sup>45</sup> *Phae.* 78c (translation LCL 36, slightly modified).

<sup>46</sup> *Phae.* 79a.

<sup>47</sup> I take this to be the principle implied by Socrates’ conclusion that the soul – being non-composite – belongs to the invisible whereas the body belongs to the visible.

unchangeable, then according to the composite/non-composite distinction, God must be incomposite since only incomposites are *self-same*. Here we can see that self-sameness provides the bridge between the idea of simplicity expressed most clearly in the *Republic*, and the composite/non-composite language in the *Phaedo*. But if we apply the composite/non-composite distinction in *Phaedo* to God, it adds further content to divine simplicity that is not seen in the *Republic*. If we take divine simplicity to mean that God is incomposite, then he must be ‘immortal (ἄθνητος), intelligible (νοητόν), uniform (μονοειδής), indissoluble (ἀδιάλυτος) and always the same as itself’ (ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτά).<sup>48</sup> On this list of terms, we could say that ‘uniform’ – being single in form – and ‘self-sameness’ are implied by divine simplicity in the *Republic* but the other three terms bring new content that is not seen in that passage. For God to be incomposite means that he could not suffer death and dissolution. Since that which is susceptible to suffer these changes is bodily existence, the lack of composition also implies that God is intelligible, graspable only through the powers of the mind and not through bodily senses. In other words, God is incorporeal. Thus the negative language of non-composition not only further qualifies the sense of God’s simplicity; it also creates a crucial connection between divine simplicity and incorporeality.

Incorporeality is only the first of many further qualifications to the basic meaning of divine simplicity if we take it to mean the lack of composition. In *Phaedo* 92a-95a, we find that the lack of composition also contains three further implications, all arising out of considerations regarding the dependence relation between a composite and its parts. First, the language of composition contains a relative order of priority regarding the *existence* of the composite and its parts. A composite could not pre-exist the elements or parts from which it is constituted, because it is necessary that the elements exist first before a composite is formed by putting together the parts. For example, a harmony is created from the putting together of the sound made by physical instruments. So it is a composite in that it is put together out of the sound of the instruments. But it is clear that a harmony could not exist before the instruments because without the latter, the harmony would not exist.<sup>49</sup> In this manner, the existence of the parts of a composite must always precede the existence of the composite itself. Non-composition, therefore, could express a sense of priority of existence because only non-composites could have nothing existing prior to itself.

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<sup>48</sup> *Phae.* 80b.

<sup>49</sup> *Phae.* 92b-c.

Second, composition implies a sense of dependence of the composite's characteristics on its parts. A composite cannot be in a different state from its parts, because it cannot act or be acted upon in any different ways from the way its parts are acting or acted upon. As a result, a composite is always directed (ἔπρεσθαι) by its elements, rather than directing (ἡγεῖσθαι) them. This sense of dependence leads to a sense of contingency in a composite regarding its characteristics. A composite's characteristic is always contingent upon how its parts are put together. Consider the example of a model which consists of various parts. If it is put together well, it is a better model. If it is put together less well, it is a worse model. Hence a composite is always susceptible to being more or less of itself, depending on how its parts are put together. On the contrary, since non-composites are not the result of the putting together of parts, they are not susceptible to being more or less of themselves. Further, if a thing is not more or less of itself, then it remains equal to itself. For example, since one soul is no more or less than another soul, it is not possible for a soul to be more or less a soul than another soul. But a composite must be open to being conceived of as more or less of itself. So the soul cannot be conceived of as composite and is therefore incomposite.<sup>50</sup> Thus a non-composite is always equal and self-same to itself because its character is not dependent on its parts since it is without parts.

Third, composition implies a sense of causal inferiority. This follows from the second point, namely, that a composite cannot be in a different state from its parts because its character is contingent upon its parts. For example, if the soul is a composite arising out of bodily parts, then it cannot act in anyway contrary to its parts. In this case, the soul would not be the commanding part of human beings because it will surrender to every direction given by the bodily parts. So if the soul is to be the commanding part of man, it is necessary that it is incomposite, for otherwise it could not act in contrary ways to its parts.<sup>51</sup> On this reasoning, a lack of composition also expresses a lack of causal inferiority associated with the constraints imposed by the possession of parts.

The composite/non-composite distinction in the *Phaedo* offers a further elaboration on divine simplicity. As we have seen in the *Republic*, the application of ἀπλοῦς to God express a sense of self-sameness – that God is permanent, ever the same without any deviation from who he is. It is precisely this basic intuition of self-sameness that could afford further elaborations by the denial of parts and composition in God. However, while the meaning of simplicity is at

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<sup>50</sup> *Phae.* 93a-e.

<sup>51</sup> *Phae.* 94b-95a.

once metaphysical and ethical in the *Republic*, the language of non-composition offers an elaboration of divine simplicity purely at the metaphysical level. From the language of non-composition, it is not possible to deduce the interconnection between metaphysical and ethical simplicity so apparent in the *Republic*. Hence the language of non-composition does not retain the nature of the metaphysical-ethical synthesis found in the basic meaning of simplicity set out in the *Republic*. It is therefore important to differentiate the two senses of divine simplicity. The sense of simplicity set out in the *Republic* is not identical to the sense of simplicity as non-composition in the *Phaedo*. Consequently, the *Republic* and the *Phaedo* sets out two distinct ways to interpret divine simplicity.

We can now summarise the two Platonic trajectories in a schematic manner, as follows:

1. Basic Simplicity (ἀπλοῦς):
  - a. Singleness in form
  - b. Unchangeability = permanent perfection
    - i. God could not be changed by another
    - ii. God would not change himself
  - c. Ethical purity
2. Non-Composition (ἄσύνθετον)
  - a. Incorporeal
    - i. Immortal (ἄθάνατος)
    - ii. Intelligible (νοητόν)
    - iii. Uniform (μονοειδής)
    - iv. Indissoluble (ἀδιάλυτος)
    - v. Always the same as itself (ἀεὶ κατὰ ταῦτά)
    - vi. Invisible (ἄδής)
  - b. Nothing exists prior to itself
  - c. Always equal and self-same to itself, admitting no more or less in itself
  - d. Lack of causal inferiority associated with the constraints imposed by the possession of parts.

Having set out the two trajectories of interpretations, I shall now turn to show that when divine simplicity first emerged in the apologists, the idea is expressed mainly through the language of non-composition.

## THE EMERGENCE OF DIVINE SIMPLICITY IN ANTE-NICENE THEOLOGY: THE GREEK APOLOGISTS

In the *Republic*, Plato introduced the idea of divine simplicity with a very specific purpose in mind. Divine simplicity was the second rule in his attempt to establish ‘patterns for theology’ that would always represent a god as he is. These patterns are required because classical storytellers did not always portray the gods in ways that are helpful to the development of the potential guardians of the state. God is commonly depicted as an anthropomorphic representation, appearing in multiple different shapes or forms to humans. For Plato, these stories ‘blaspheme the gods’ with an invalid theology where a god is not represented as he is— as a divine being who is unchangeable and single in form.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the stories from the poets are unhelpful for the education of potential guardians because they ‘make children more cowardly’.<sup>53</sup> So according to Plato, stories about the divine must be filtered and selected according the correct ‘patterns for theology’ such that young men are prevented from being led astray by false stories about the gods. The two laws which form the patterns for theology – God’s goodness and simplicity – thus serve as ‘grammatical’ rules to regulate discourse about God: only theological language that is in accordance with God’s goodness and simplicity would be representing God as he is and amount to true theology.

Divine simplicity emerged in Christian theology with a similar anti-anthropomorphic function.<sup>54</sup> The earliest instances of simplicity language in ante-Nicene Christian theology were found in the writings of the second century apologists. Divine simplicity as a ‘pattern for theology’ was necessary for Christian thinkers because first of all, the Christian Scriptures also contain anthropomorphic language of God. Hence divine simplicity became a useful tool for Christians to indicate that they did not interpret anthropomorphic language in Scripture literally. In Justin Martyr, for instance, we find this function of divine simplicity in the context of his debate with the Jew Trypho about correct scriptural interpretation of the Old Testament. Further, in Athenagoras’ defence of the Christians against the charge of ‘atheism’, we find that divine simplicity was drawn upon to clarify the Christian affirmation of monotheism. Thus divine simplicity was used by Christian writers in a variety of argumentative contexts, but with a

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<sup>52</sup> In other words, they violate Plato’s pattern for theology: ‘...you should always present a god as he really is’ (οἷος τυγχάνει ὁ θεὸς ὧν, ἀεὶ δὴπου ἀποδοτέον). (*Rep.* 379a.)

<sup>53</sup> *Rep.* 381d-e.

<sup>54</sup> On this point, see Mark B. Sheridan O. S., *Language for God in Patristic Tradition: Wrestling with Biblical Anthropomorphism* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015). Sheridan argues that patristic theology needs to be read in light of the wider anti-anthropomorphic trend in Greek philosophical theology.



similar function: as a strategy to rule out unacceptable notions of the divine. What is clear, however, is that in affirming divine simplicity, the apologists primarily made use of the language of non-composition. Consequently, divine simplicity emerged in Christian discourse primarily as a purely metaphysical doctrine.

### *Justin Martyr*

One of the earliest instances of simplicity language in early Christian theology is found in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* (ca. 155-161). In this work, Justin frequently debates with the Jew Trypho regarding the referent of 'God' (or other names referring to the divine) in the Old Testament. For Trypho there is only one referent of 'God' in the Scriptures. For Justin, however, both Father, the Maker of all things, and Jesus Christ, the power begotten from the Father, can both be identified as possible referents for the name 'God' in the Scriptures. The burden is then on Justin to show: (i) that this interpretation does not divide divinity and turn the Christians into polytheists, and (ii) how to understand the relation between the Father and Jesus Christ who are both called 'God'. On the surface, Justin seems to be debating Trypho about scriptural interpretation. However, underlying this hermeneutical debate is a deeper question about the grammar of divinity, since this grammar determines whether certain interpretations are plausible for a particular passage.<sup>55</sup> Recognizing this layer of the debate is crucial for us to see the way in which divine simplicity serves as a 'pattern for theology' in Justin.

In *Dial.* 114, Justin explains the importance of comprehending the Holy Spirit's manner of speaking in the Scriptures in order to understand the full meaning of the texts.<sup>56</sup> In doing so, he targets the interpretations offered by the teachers of his interlocutors. He accuses these teachers for interpreting the Scriptures in an earthly (*ταπεινῶς*) manner that is overly literal and leads to an inadequate picture of God.<sup>57</sup> After illustrating his point at length using various Old Testament passages, Justin moves to an example from Ps 8:4:

And when he says, *I shall see the heavens, the work of your fingers*, unless I comprehend the operation of his Word, I shall not understand the passage.

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<sup>55</sup> For instance, if we think that God the Father and Creator cannot be contained in any place and is without a body, then it is implausible to interpret certain Old Testament theophanies as referring to him. For Justin, the central hermeneutical possibility in question is the appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. If one can establish that certain passages cannot refer to the Creator God and Father, then this obviously opens the possibility of another one referred to as 'God' in the Scriptures. See *Dial.* 127.2-5.

<sup>56</sup> *Dial.* 114.1.

<sup>57</sup> See *Dial.* 112.1. Presumably, from Justin's argument we can infer that these teachers were probably interpreting the Old Testament passages as literally implying that God has a 'bodily form' or corporeal appearance.

Then I would be like your teachers, who imagine that the Father of the universe, the unbegotten God, has hands and feet and fingers and a soul like a compound creature (ὥς σύνθετον ζῷον). As a result of this belief, they claim that the Father himself appeared to Abraham and Jacob.<sup>58</sup>

In this passage, Justin argues that if one reads the Scriptures too literally, one will be led to suppose that God the Father has fingers and hands, and that he appeared to Abraham and Jacob in the Old Testament like a creature. The phrase Justin uses here is illuminating: ὥς σύνθετον ζῷον. What Justin meant by this phrase can be inferred from the context of his argument. Contrary to what his interlocutors' teachers were teaching, for Justin the Creator in the Old Testament is not to be thought of as referring to a being who appeared to the patriarchs in a visible, bodily form. Reading Ps 8.4 this way would result in an inadequate notion of God. Rather, just like Christ is (according to Justin's interpretation) called in Scriptures a stone or given the names Jacob and Israel *figuratively*, the description of God possessing hands and fingers should also be understood in a similar way.<sup>59</sup>

The way Justin uses non-composition language here is clear. An adequate notion of God must rule out the possibility that God can literally possess bodily parts. Justin uses simplicity to justify the Christian case that since God (the Father and Maker) is without bodily parts, it follows that (i) He cannot be the subject of certain passages and hence these must refer to someone else<sup>60</sup>, and (ii) certain passages must not be read literally and must contain non-literal meanings (the validity of which opens up the possibility of a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament). Any scriptural interpretations that imply this must be ruled out as implausible on the ground that they violate divine non-composition. Thus, just as the law of non-contradiction is cited without further elaboration to rule out certain illogical possibilities in our discourse, in Justin, divine simplicity functions in a similar way to rule out certain theological possibilities. To say that God is not composite is shorthand for the rule that any 'grammatically' correct way to speak of God cannot possibly imply that He possesses bodily parts.

#### *Athenagoras*

Athenagoras' *Legatio pro Christianis* (ca. 176-177) provides us with another early example of simplicity language in Christian discourse. The *Legatio* is a three-part defence against three

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<sup>58</sup> *Dial.* 114.3.

<sup>59</sup> *Dial.* 114.2, 4-5.

<sup>60</sup> *Dial.* 127.1-5

accusations that the Christians were charged with: atheism, Thyestean banquets and Oedipean unions.<sup>61</sup> In the first part against the charge of atheism, Athenagoras argues that Christians are monotheists and monotheism is the supreme and most worthy form of theism according to reason as well as the poets and philosophers. If this is so, he argues, then Christians should not be persecuted for their beliefs. Central to Athenagoras' defence is the rationality of monotheism. The demonstration of the truth of monotheism is at the core of everything that Athenagoras said in the first part of the *Legatio*.

In *Leg.* 8, Athenagoras draws on divine simplicity in his well-known argument for the oneness of God.<sup>62</sup> The argument is divided into two parts, where each part considers and rejects a possibility that follows from polytheism. If there were two or more gods, then either (a) these gods would be in one and the same category or genus (ἐν ἐνὶ καὶ ταὐτῷ)<sup>63</sup> or (b) each god would be in its own distinct category or genus from the other gods (ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστος αὐτῶν).<sup>64</sup> Divine simplicity appears in the first part of this argument and so my analysis will concentrate on this part of the argument. In the first part, Athenagoras considers two different ways for two or more gods to be in one and the same genus – either the gods are similar to each other through participating in the same model (τοῖς παραδείγμασιν)<sup>65</sup> or as complementary parts (συμπληρωτικὰ μέρη) in a composite organism. Divine simplicity appears as part of the consideration of the latter possibility. Athenagoras writes:

If it is suggested that God is one, as in the case of one body a hand and eye and foot are complementary parts forming one being (ὡς χεὶρ καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς καὶ ποὺς

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<sup>61</sup> *Leg.* 3.1.

<sup>62</sup> This argument is notoriously complex and its interpretation is controversial amongst Athenagoras scholars. Here, my task is to examine only the function of divine simplicity in the first half of the argument and not the whole argument itself. See David Rankin, *Athenagoras: Philosopher and Theologian* (Farnham, England ; Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2009), 94–95 for a summary of the scholarly debate.

<sup>63</sup> The interpretation of this phrase is difficult. There are two general positions available: (a) it refers to the nature of the gods as being in one and the same genus (or being one and the same), (b) it refers to the place or location of the gods being one and the same. Rankin, Pouderon and Schoedel favour the former the position, treating the phrase as dealing with the possibility of one nature or essence amongst the gods (Rankin, *Athenagoras*, 95; Athenagoras, *Legatio and De Resurrectione*, trans. William R. Schoedel (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 17, n1. Bernard Pouderon, *Athénagore d'Athènes: philosophe chrétien*, vol. 82, *Théologie historique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1989), 126–27.) Abraham Malherbe, on the other hand, has argued that 'ἐν ἐνὶ καὶ ταὐτῷ' should be interpreted as referring 'to the place of the gods, and not to their genus' (Abraham J. Malherbe, "Structure of Athenagoras, Supplicatio pro Christianis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 23, no. 1 (March 1969): 1–20, n.77 (15)). In my view, the first position provides a more coherent reading of *Leg.* 8 and I have taken this position here. Pouderon's division of the argument into essence, place and action is particularly illuminating.

<sup>64</sup> *Leg.* 8.1.

<sup>65</sup> *Leg.* 8.2.

περὶ ἓν σῶμά εἰσιν συμπληρωτικὰ μέρη), we reply: Socrates, since he is created and perishable, is indeed composite (συγκείμενος) and divisible into parts (διαιρούμενος); but God is uncreated, impassible, and indivisible; he does not consists of parts.<sup>66</sup>

We can imagine the kind of models Athenagoras had in mind: consider two or more beings. These beings can be regarded as gods in the sense that each of them participate in a single composite divine organism as parts. On the basis of this model, multiple gods can then be treated as different parts of a divine organism that possesses some form of unity. Athenagoras did not specify the targets of his argument but there are some hints as to which contemporaries he might have in mind. In *Leg.* 6.3, Athenagoras states that ‘Aristotle and his school bring before us one God whom they liken to a composite living being (ζῶον σύνθετον) and say that he consists of soul and body (ἐκ ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος συνεστηκότα λέγουσι τὸν θεόν).’ As L.W. Barnard has pointed out, Athenagoras is probably holding a misconception of the Aristotelian doctrine derived from a secondary source.<sup>67</sup> As Athenagoras has noted clearly in *Leg.* 6.2, his summary is not intended as an exact account but is based upon doxographical accounts. Nevertheless, on the basis of his sources, he might have regarded the Aristotelians as proposing a single divine being that is constituted of parts and in this manner akin to composite living beings. Further, Athenagoras might have the Stoics in mind as well, who held that the cosmos is a living being ordered with reason<sup>68</sup> and is thus ensouled, rational and intelligent (ζῶον...λογικὸν καὶ ἔμψυχον καὶ νοερόν).<sup>69</sup> God is the active, life-giving and rational principle which permeates the cosmos and is immanent within it.<sup>70</sup> While God remains for the Stoics the active principle, Stoic physics in an important sense identifies God with the cosmos – the living organism itself<sup>71</sup> – with the result that God in this account could be pictured as an ‘intellectual body’, which makes him into a composite of form and matter.<sup>72</sup> Regardless of the exact identity

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<sup>66</sup> *Leg.* 8.3.

<sup>67</sup> L.W. Barnard, *Athenagoras: a study in second century Christian apologetic* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1972), 89.

<sup>68</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *VP* 7.138-9.

<sup>69</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *VP* 7.142-3.

<sup>70</sup> This is a complex matter and there is no need for us to get into the details here. See A. A. Long and D.N. Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Volume 1: Translations of the Principal Sources with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 268–79 for the details. See also Jean-Baptiste Gourinat, “The Stoics on Matter and Prime Matter: ‘Corporealism’ and the Imprint of Plato’s *Timaeus*,” in *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, ed. Ricardo Salles (Oxford; New York: OUP Oxford, 2009), 46–70 (50-1).

<sup>71</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *VP* 7.147-8.

<sup>72</sup> This is indeed how some Platonists criticised the Stoic doctrine. Michael J. White, “Stoic Natural Philosophy (Physics and Cosmology),” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 124–52 (129-30).

of Athenagoras' target, according to him the picture of a divine organism constituting multiple parts is problematic because it proposes a false account of unity which treats divine unity as in the case of wholes that are composed of parts.<sup>73</sup> Since God is not created and perishable, divine unity is not like the unity in Socrates or other created beings because God is simple. We can put the argument in the following form:

- (1) Only generated things can be composite and are constituted of parts.
  - (2) God is ungenerated and ontologically unlike generated things (such as Socrates).
- Therefore,
- (3) God is simple without compositions.

Athenagoras' understanding is grounded on the common philosophical assumption in his time that there is an intrinsic connection between being generated (or coming into existence) and composition. What is generated is also composite (συνκεῖμενος) and divisible into parts (διαιρούμενος εἰς μέρη). As a result, it is also transient (i.e. perishable).<sup>74</sup> When this point is taken for granted, then divine simplicity (the non-composite nature of God) can be used to articulate a distinction between divine and non-divine realities. Since God is not generated, he does not possess the kind of composition exemplified in the case of Socrates. It follows that one cannot consider the divine as an organic unity of different gods on the basis of divine simplicity. Consequently, it cannot be the case that two or more gods exist as complementary parts of a single divine composite organism. For Athenagoras, divine simplicity therefore rules out the possibility of conceiving God as a divine organism, as conceived perhaps by some philosophers in Athenagoras' time.

From our brief examination of Justin and Athenagoras, it is clear that divine simplicity emerged as a 'pattern of theology' to regulate what counts as correct theology. Each apologist turned to divine simplicity in his own way to support a different theological argument. For Justin, the function of simplicity is to rule out overly literal interpretation of the Old Testament. For Athenagoras, divine simplicity rules out a theology that is opened to polytheistic

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<sup>73</sup> In the *Legatio*, Athenagoras does not provide us with sufficient details to work out what kinds of parts God lacks. But from the example we are given, namely, the case of Socrates, it seems that the sense of parts sufficient for Athenagoras' argument is simply parts which result from the process of division. Since God is ungenerated, Athenagoras concludes that God must be one without division because being divisible into parts is a characteristic only for generated beings (see premise 1 of the argument). If we express Athenagoras' understanding of 'parts' with reference to Koslicki's schema of different senses of 'parts' based on Aristotle (Kathrin Koslicki, *The Structure Of Objects* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, U.S.A., 2010), 139.), we can hypothesise that at least option one, two and four in Koslicki's schema are excluded from God by Athenagoras.

<sup>74</sup> Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 9–10.

interpretation. Hence in both apologists, divine simplicity functions in a similar manner, even though the precise theological views ruled out differs in each case. Further, in both Justin and Athenagoras, the meaning of divine simplicity is expressed mainly through the language of non-composition. It is assumed that God is non-composite, meaning that he is incorporeal in the case of Justin, ungenerated and without parts in the case of Athenagoras. In both apologists, we do not find a trace of the metaphysical-ethical synthesis found in Plato's *Republic*. Rather, the primary expression is through the language of non-composition in the *Phaedo*. Given that the earliest expressions of divine simplicity were found in the apologists, we can therefore conclude that divine simplicity emerged as a purely metaphysical doctrine in Christian theological discourse.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that latent in Plato are two trajectories for interpreting divine simplicity. On the one hand, in the *Republic*, Plato describes divine simplicity without posing any sharp disjunction between the metaphysical and ethical meaning of simplicity. On the other hand, in the *Phaedo*, Plato sets out the language of non-composition that further elaborates on the meaning of simplicity. I have suggested that we should differentiate between the basic meaning of simplicity and the metaphysical elaborations of simplicity as non-composition in the *Phaedo*. While the two are connected, nevertheless the language of non-composition disguises the fact that the basic meaning of simplicity is a metaphysical-ethical synthesis.

Following Plato's *Republic*, divine simplicity emerged in Christian theological discourse as a 'pattern for theology' against anthropomorphism. The second century apologists took the logic of non-composition in the *Phaedo* and applied it to regulate whatever theological discourse in which they are involved. The exclusive focus on the language of non-composition suggests that divine simplicity emerged as a purely metaphysical doctrine. But in the next chapter, I shall demonstrate that richer formulations of divine simplicity which preserves the metaphysical-ethical synthesis in the *Republic* were possible in the ante-Nicene period. To this end, we will have to turn to Origen.

## CHAPTER 2

### *I do not change* (Mal. 3.6)

#### Divine Simplicity as a Metaphysical-Ethical Synthesis in Origen

In the last chapter, I have argued that Plato's *Republic* determines a trajectory for interpreting divine simplicity without a sharp separation between the metaphysical and ethical sense of simplicity. On this reading, God's simplicity is concerned both with his *nature* as well as his *character*. In this chapter, my thesis is that the richest ante-Nicene formulation of divine simplicity found in Origen of Alexandria preserves the character of a metaphysical-ethical synthesis in the *Republic*. By turning to examine Origen's theological reasoning for divine simplicity, as well as to set out the contexts – polemical and exegetical – that gives rise to Origen's doctrine, I seek to demonstrate that Origen's theological reasoning for divine simplicity has two dimensions, affirming that God is simple based on both metaphysical (in terms of incorporeality of the divine nature) and ethical (in terms of goodness of the divine character) reasoning.<sup>75</sup> Origen applies both senses of simplicity to God in a tightly-knitted way so that his affirmation of divine simplicity can be seen not only as two dimensional, but also as a *synthesis*.<sup>76</sup> By synthesis, I mean that for Origen, the two senses of simplicity are explicitly correlated with one another. If we try to capture this synthesis by one single intuition, we could say that for God to be simple means that he is self-same – a notion that is easily interpreted in a metaphysical-ethical manner. Consequently, the upshot of this chapter is that Origen affirms divine simplicity because God must be self-same both in his *nature* as well as in his *character*.

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<sup>75</sup> Scholars who have analysed Origen's doctrine of God tend to focus on what I call the *metaphysical* aspect and situate simplicity within this aspect. See Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition*, Brown Judaic Studies 69 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1984), 123–27; Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 22–25 (While he does not recognise the ethical sense of simplicity, Widdicombe however rightly highlights the close connection in Origen between God as the good and the metaphysical notion of God as “he who is” [ὁ ὢν]. Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 26. In my view, the over-focus on metaphysical simplicity is problematic for two reasons. First, it misses the importance of the ethical meaning of simplicity when it comes to God. Second, and more crucially, it misses the fact that for Origen, the metaphysical sense in which the divine nature is simple (which many scholars have noted) is intimately correlated with the ethical sense in which the divine character is simple. In my view, this connection is crucial for appreciating the meaning and the theological ground for divine simplicity in Origen.

<sup>76</sup> This synthesis is so striking that one scholar has recently called it “das metaphysisch-ethische Einheitsdenken des Origenes” (Origen's metaphysical-ethical doctrine of oneness). See Origen, *Die Homilien zum Ersten Buch Samuel*, trans. Alfons Fürst (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 31–59.

My argument will take us first to Origen's metaphysical doctrine of divine simplicity. Given that this is more well-known, I shall spend the majority of this section sketching out what is less emphasised by scholars, namely, the immediate polemical context that motivated Origen to articulate this doctrine in its most detailed form in *PArch* I.1.6. I then turn to uncover what I call the ethical doctrine of divine simplicity in Origen. Based on close analyses of exegetical and homiletical works, I argue that Origen employs the contrast between the one and the many in an ethical sense, that is, for the purpose of discussing good and evil. This ethical sense of the one and many in turn is understood in terms of unchangeability and mutability. Hence in Origen, we find the same interconnection between ethical purity, unity and unchangeability central to the presentation of divine simplicity in Plato's *Republic*. Finally, I shall demonstrate that there is an explicit link in Origen's thought between the metaphysical and the ethical senses of divine simplicity, thus suggesting that he indeed understood divine simplicity as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis.

#### THE METAPHYSICAL SIMPLICITY OF THE DIVINE NATURE

The metaphysical dimension of Origen's understanding of divine simplicity needs to be situated within his wider metaphysical doctrine of God. This is because Origen's reasoning for divine simplicity forms part of his wider argument for divine incorporeality – the idea that God is without a body. Origen develops divine incorporeality with what some scholars have called *Geistmetaphysik* – the stress on God as a purely intellectual existence which distinguishes him from corporeal existence.<sup>77</sup> It is in the context of working out how to characterise the intellectual-incorporeal divine existence where we find Origen's metaphysical reflections on divine simplicity. Thus divine simplicity is not an isolated idea in Origen's thought, but constitutes an integral part of his wider philosophical theology.

Origen's metaphysical doctrine of God in turn needs to be read in light of two contexts. First, Origen's philosophical theology bears resemblance to the one found in Middle-Platonic writers such as Alcinous and Numenius. Without implying that Origen was some sort of 'Platonist'<sup>78</sup>, as an Alexandrian he had most likely inherited a tradition of metaphysical thinking

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<sup>77</sup> See Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge England; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39–68. Osborn took this term from the work of H.J. Krämer (Der Ursprung der Geistmetaphysik. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Platonismus zwischen Platon und Plotin).

<sup>78</sup> This point is controversial. See M. J. Edwards, *Origen Against Plato* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002) for an argument against identifying Origen as



about God that was conversant in Middle-Platonic philosophical theology.<sup>79</sup> Hence Middle-Platonic philosophical theology will shed light on Origen's metaphysics of divine simplicity. Secondly, Origen's philosophical theology must be read in light of its exegetical context. Origen's explicit discussions on philosophical theology – including divine simplicity – are frequently found in the context of interpreting three specific Scriptural passages: Deut 4.24, Jn 4.24 and 1 Jn 1.5. Origen's metaphysics did not develop in a speculative vacuum, but rather out of the need to provide an adequate exegesis of key Scriptural passages. In what follows, I shall not attempt a comprehensive examination of Origen's philosophical theology.<sup>80</sup> Rather, I shall focus on drawing out the key aspects of Origen's metaphysical reasoning for divine simplicity through an examination of *PArch* I.1.6 where we find Origen's most developed presentation on the theme. This exploration will first examine the immediate polemical significance of *PArch* I.1, and then turn to analyse Origen's metaphysics of divine simplicity in *PArch* I.1.6.

#### *Origen's Metaphysical Doctrine of Divine Simplicity in PArch I.1.6: Context*

##### A. The immediate polemical context

*PArch* I.1 is arguably the most systematic presentation of Origen's understanding of the divine nature. However, this chapter was not written for purely speculative purposes, but with a particular agenda in mind. Its purpose is to criticise those who held that God is a body, and to provide an alternative account of God as incorporeal. Origen consistently contrasts his account of God as incorporeal and intellectual with the doctrines of the 'corporealists' – Stoics and Epicureans – of his time. Origen's emphasis on divine incorporeality springs from his conviction

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a 'Platonist.' ; See Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, "Origen and the Platonic Tradition," *Religions* 8, no. 21 (2017): 1–20 for a different perspective on the question.

<sup>79</sup> Scholars debate about whether Origen's philosophical theology is to be aligned with 'Middle-Platonic' or 'Neo-Platonic' tendencies. See Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 113–17 for a review of the debate. In my view, Berchman's situation of Origen as "Middle-Platonic" is helpful. Amongst many things, this approach sheds light on Origen's insistence on God as a simple intellectual existence. Origen shows uncertainty as to whether God is to be identified as mind or whether he transcends mind (*CCels.* VII.38). See Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 34–43 for a discussion of this problem. In my view, Origen's early philosophical theology set out in *PArch* I.1 seems to align more with Middle-Platonic theology found for example in Alcinoüs (*Did.* 10). However, as we shall see in the next chapter, there is an anti-Monarchian strand of Origen's exegetical theology which stresses on the differentiation between the Father and the Son in a way which resembles the Neo-Pythagorean (e.g. Numenius' fr. 11 des Places) hierarchical understanding of the *archai*. This strand of Origen's theology bears close resemblance to Neo-platonism. Given that this section primarily focuses on *PArch* I.1, I shall set out Origen's philosophical theology as Middle-Platonic.

<sup>80</sup> See Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 113–64 for a detailed analysis of Origen's doctrine of the first principles.

that any corporeal understanding of God leads to an inappropriately anthropomorphic theology. Hence the significance of Origen's arguments for divine simplicity in *PArch* I.1 must be read in light of this anti-corporealist polemical context.<sup>81</sup> So to begin, we must first examine how this polemic forms the central context of Origen's philosophical theology in *PArch* I.1.6.

In Origen's time, it is common for philosophers to debate about the nature of the first principle(s).<sup>82</sup> So it is no surprise to see Origen joining this debate. However, Origen's engagement with the debate springs from a specific exegetical concern. His interest in the applicability of ἀσώματον<sup>83</sup> to God in the *Peri Archon* is occasioned by the need to address an exegetical problem related to three key passages: Deut 4.24, Jn 4.24, and 1 Jn 1.5. These passages demand metaphysical reflection on the divine essence because according to Origen, each provides an account of the divine essence: Deut 4.24 (God is a consuming fire), Jn 4.24 (God is spirit) and 1 Jn 1.5 (God is light).<sup>84</sup> Given the grammatical structure of these passages ('God is X'), one's interpretation of the key terms ('fire', 'spirit' and 'light') will inevitably lead to an account of the divine essence. So a lot is at stake regarding the interpretation of these passages. In *ComJn* XIII.123, as a preface to his exegesis of the three passages, Origen specifies the different positions on the nature of God's essence available in his time:

Many have produced lengthy discussions of God and his essence, so that (A) on the one hand some have said that he has a bodily nature which is composed of fine particles and is like ether, but (B) on the other hand (B1) others [have said] that he is incorporeal, (B2) and still others [have said] that he is beyond essence in dignity and power.

Πολλῶν πολλὰ περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀποφηναμένων καὶ τῆς οὐσίας αὐτοῦ, ὥστε τινὰς μὲν εἰρηκέναι καὶ αὐτὸν σωματικῆς φύσεως λεπτομεροῦς καὶ αἰθερώδους, τινὰς δὲ ἀσώματου καὶ ἄλλους ὑπερέκεινα οὐσίας πρεσβεῖα καὶ δυνάμει

In this passage, Origen identifies three positions: (A) God's essence is like a composite body, (B1) God's essence is incorporeal. (B2) God is beyond or above essence. From the structure of the

<sup>81</sup> And certainly also in light of Plato's anti-anthropomorphic 'pattern of theology' in the *Republic*.

<sup>82</sup> See George E. Karamanolis, *The Philosophy of Early Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2014), 60–116.

<sup>83</sup> This term is central to the *Peri Archon* as a whole. Origen explicitly mentions in *PArch* praef. 8-9 that he seeks to search for the equivalent of this philosophical term in Scripture. The solution is found in *PArch* I.1 where Origen identifies the term 'invisible' in Scripture as equivalent to ἀσώματον. See also *PArch* II.3.6. The conclusion of his inquiry on this problem is found in *PArch* IV.3.15.

<sup>84</sup> *ComJn* XIII.124.

passage (μὲν...δὲ), it is clear that Origen wishes to contrast between the first position (A) and the latter two positions (B1 & B2). Presumably, this is due to the fact that whereas the first position affirms the corporeality of God, the latter two positions both deny it. This broader contrast makes it clear why deciding between these positions matters hermeneutically with respect to the three Scriptural passages. If the divine essence is to be understood corporeally, then the terms ‘fire’, ‘spirit’ and ‘light’ must be interpreted literally as referring to corporeal realities. But if the divine essence is incorporeal, or God is beyond essence, then the terms must be interpreted beyond their literal sense. In these two cases, an alternative to the literal reading needs to be supplied in order to make sense of these passages as a specification of the nature of the divine essence. Hence Origen’s interest in the debate concerning the nature of the divine essence is firmly placed within his hermeneutical concern for reading Deut 4.24, Jn 4.24 and 1 Jn 1.5 in a theologically coherent manner. While scholars have struggled to identify which of the three options represents Origen’s exact position, there is no doubt that he favours the latter two positions over the first. From this perspective, Origen’s exegetical problem with these passages is that they are prone to be read as providing evidence of divine corporeality. He is concerned that the terms ‘fire’, ‘spirit’ and ‘light’ are taken by some as referring literally to realities perceptible to the bodily senses. This raises the question: who were the opponents of Origen who interpreted the Scripture in this manner?

It has been suggested that Origen probably had in mind the ‘Christian Stoics’, not the ‘unsophisticated anthropomorphites’, in *PArb* I.1 when he explicitly rebuked his opponents’ interpretation of Deut 4.24, Jn 4.24 and 1 Jn 1.5.<sup>85</sup> According to Stoic physics, every existent thing is corporeal. This is grounded on the criterion that any existent being must display the power or capacity (δύναμις) of acting or being acted upon. Based on this criterion, the Stoics argues that all existent things must be corporeal because only bodies can act or being acted upon. This does not mean that bodies are the only items in Stoic ontology. But it does mean that for Stoic principles which account for the cosmos are corporeal: God is the active principle whereas unqualified matter is the passive principle.<sup>86</sup> Hence in the Stoic scheme, God is a co-principle with matter, acting together to generate all existent things. It is difficult to say whether it is

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<sup>85</sup> Stroumsa argues that while the latter appears frequently in Origen’s corpus for their literal reading of Scripture, including language that applies physical properties or motions to God, the former is more likely to be Origen’s target. See G. Stroumsa, “The Incorporeality of God,” *Religion* 13, no. 4 (1983): 346–47; This identification is also made by Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 259, 276–80; and Edwards, *Origen Against Plato*, 57.

<sup>86</sup> For a good summary of Stoic physics, see Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Volume 1*, 271.

correct to accuse the Stoics of making God a material principle.<sup>87</sup> What is clear is that God and matter both share physical characteristics as they both possess bodies. However, this is not to say that there is no fundamental difference between God and matter. It seems that the Stoics were attempting to articulate a subtle middle way between dualism and materialistic monism (the view that everything is material). Nevertheless, throughout his corpus, Origen offers a polemical reading of Stoic theology that is common to Platonists of his time.<sup>88</sup> According to Origen, the fundamental error of Stoic theology is to make God a corporeal principle. God is not an unchanging reality that is most simple and fundamentally prior to all created things. Rather, God is subjected to change and corruption. This polemical interpretation of Stoic theology appears frequently in Origen's corpus and is best summarised by the following passage in the *Contra Celsum*:

...the Stoics who maintain that God is a material substance (οἱ σῶμα εἰπόντες τὸν θεόν)...introduces a corruptible first principle which is corporeal (ἀρχὴν φθαρτὴν εἰσάγοντος τὴν σωματικὴν). According to this last view, of the Stoics, even God is a material substance (ὁ θεὸς...ἔστι σῶμα), and they are not ashamed to say that He is capable of change (τρεπτὸν) and complete alteration (δι' ὅλων ἀλλοιωτὸν) and transformation (μεταβλητὸν), and in general liable to corruption (ἀπαξαπλῶς δυνάμενον φθαρεῖν) if there is anyone to corrupt Him; as there is nothing which can do so He is fortunate enough not to be corrupted.<sup>89</sup>

Origen's explicit critique of Stoic theology in the *Contra Celsum* lends plausibility to the suggestion that he is directly concerned with those who read Deut 4.24, Jn 4.24 and 1 Jn 1.5 through the lens of Stoic physics. This identification is given further weight by the fact that the key term in Jn 4.24 – 'spirit' (πνεῦμα) – is central in the Stoic account of conflagration.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, in *CCels.* VI.69-71, we have a further piece of evidence that the opponents Origen had in mind in *PArch* I.1 were indeed Christian Stoics. The context of this passage is that Celsus had accused the Christian teaching of the incarnation as unworthy of the divine, making God known to creatures through a kind of corporeal process.<sup>91</sup> In response, Origen accuses Celsus of failing to understand the

<sup>87</sup> *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, ed. by Richard Salles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

<sup>88</sup> White, "Stoic Natural Philosophy (Physics and Cosmology)," 130.

<sup>89</sup> *CCels.* I.21.

<sup>90</sup> Berchman, *From Philo to Origen*, 276–77; White, "Stoic Natural Philosophy (Physics and Cosmology)," 133–38.

<sup>91</sup> *CCels.* VI.69.

Christian position correctly. What is striking is that Origen's argument in response to Celsus in *CCels.* VI.69-70 contains a number of points that are stated in the earlier work, *PArch* I.1:

- (1) God is incorporeal and thus invisible. The Son of God made God known by being the image of the invisible God. (*CCels.* VI.69; *PArch* I.1.8)
- (2) The invisible God may be perceived with by the 'heart', that is the 'mind'. (*CCels.* VI.69; *PArch* I.1.9)
- (3) God shares his Spirit to those who can participate in him (the saints). But God's Spirit is not to be conceived of as being cut into parts, divided up, and distributed to the saints. (*CCels.* VI.70; *PArch* I.1.2)
- (4) Deut 4.24 is not to be interpreted literally. God is not a corporeal fire, and he does not consume corporeal things. Rather, the 'wood or hay or stubble' (1 Cor 3.12) consumed by God refer to sins. (*CCels.* VI.70; *PArch* I.1.2)
- (5) Based on 2 Cor 3.6, we are to read certain passages (Jn 4.24, Deut 4.24) according to the spirit, not according to the letter. (*CCels.* VI.70; *PArch* I.1.2)
- (6) Speaking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus taught that God is not to be worshipped in flesh and material places. Rather, God is to be worshipped in spirit (understood in an incorporeal sense). (*CCels.* VI.70; *PArch* I.1.4)

In *CCels.* VI.71, Origen reveals the heart of his criticism against Celsus. Celsus' chief error is to lump the Christians and the Stoics together when it comes to the term 'spirit'.<sup>92</sup> Since the Christians, like the Stoics, have made *πνεῦμα* a key term in their theology, Celsus infers that the Christians must have understood the terms corporeally like the Stoics. Origen recognises the problem created by this commonality between the Christians and the Stoics. His response is to summarise Stoic teaching and differentiate it from Christian teaching:

According to the opinion of the Stoics, who maintain that the first principles are corporeal, and who on this account hold that everything is destructible and venture even to make the supreme God Himself destructible (unless this seemed to them to be utterly outrageous), even the Logos of God that comes down to men and to the most insignificant things is nothing other than a material spirit. But in the view of us Christians, the divine Logos is not material. The Stoics may destroy everything in a

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<sup>92</sup> 'Because Celsus has not comprehended the doctrine about the Spirit of God...he takes into his head the notion that when we 'say God is spirit, there is in this respect no difference between us and the Stoics among the Greeks who affirm that God is spirit that has permeated all things and contains all things within itself.' (*CCels.* VI.71)

conflagration if they like. But we do not recognize that an incorporeal being is subject to a conflagration, or that the soul of man is dissolved into fire, or that this happens to the being of angels, or thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers.<sup>93</sup>

This passage shows that Origen is familiar with the Stoic doctrine of cosmic conflagration. His criticism of the Stoics in the earlier books of the *Contra Celsum* is likely to be deduced from the thought that if God is involved in the process of cosmic conflagration, then God is inevitably subjected to ‘change, complete alteration, transformation and corruption’.<sup>94</sup> Taking all the evidence together, we have a full picture concerning the polemical context of *PArch* I.1. Early in his Alexandrian period, as an exegete and philosopher, Origen was already sensitive to the problem caused by Deut 4.24 and Jn 4.24. On the one hand, he was aware of the debates concerning the nature of the first principle(s). On the other hand, he was aware that a background in Stoic physics is likely to lead some Christians to utilise key terms in Scripture (Deut 4.24 – ‘fire’, Jn 4.24 – ‘spirit’) as grounds for divine corporeality. Consequently, he felt the need to develop a standard response in the form of a doctrine of divine incorporeality that counters the ‘Christian Stoic’ theology. This is the task that he carries out in *PArch* I.1.

#### B. The theological commitment underlying Origen’s polemics

So far, I have argued that Origen’s chapter on divine incorporeality in the *Peri Archon* was developed as a standard response primarily to ‘Christian Stoics’. Strictly speaking, it is more appropriate to speak of Origen as anti-corporealist because his critique of corporealist theology is not addressed exclusively to the Stoics, but also to the Epicureans<sup>95</sup>. While it is unlikely that we can determine the opponents of Origen in *PArch* I.1 with certainty, the exact identity of Origen’s opponents does not matter. What is clear is that Origen’s greatest concern is to affirm a robust doctrine of divine incorporeality against the corporealists. Thus Origen’s own philosophical theology – including his exposition of the metaphysics of divine simplicity – must be read as an attempt to set out an alternative. But before we analyse *PArch* I.1.6, it is helpful to see that Origen’s *polemical* insistence on divine incorporeality actually springs from a deeper *theological* commitment.

Origen’s critique of Stoic theology is based on the conviction that it is not possible to maintain God’s perfect incorruptibility while holding that God has a body. For Origen,

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<sup>93</sup> *CCels.* VI.71.

<sup>94</sup> *CCels.* I.21, III.75.

<sup>95</sup> *CCels.* IV.14.

Everything that is corporeal is subjected to change, complete alteration, transformation and corruption.<sup>96</sup> This quartet of terms is repeated in *CCels.* III.75 where he issues a criticism of Stoic theology similar to the one quoted above from *CCels.* I.21.<sup>97</sup> The Stoics might not endorse the logic that the corruptibility of God follows as a consequence of holding divine corporeality. But on Origen's reading, divine corporeality necessarily leads to a God who is mutable and subject to variation. Origen's critique of the Stoics thus reveals that he is committed to Plato's 'pattern of theology' in the *Republic*: theology that is worthy of God must not postulate change and multiplicity of forms in the divine nature.<sup>98</sup> In *CCels.* IV.14, we have a crucial passage where Origen explicitly reveals this methodological commitment to the 'Platonic' rule. In this passage, Origen is responding to Celsus, who argued that the Christian account of God's descent into the world through the incarnation is inappropriate to the nature of divinity. The starting point of Celsus' theology is precisely the Platonic rule: God 'exists in the most beautiful state' and he is unchangeable. For Celsus, if God is to descend into the world, then surely God is subjected to change. The kind of change Celsus has in mind is very precise: it is a change 'from good to bad, from beautiful to shameful, from happiness to misfortune, and from what is best to what is most wicked.' In other words, Celsus is arguing not only that the incarnation will bring change to God, it will bring the most undesirable change, namely, from a perfect state to its contrary. But why should this be the case? Celsus' explanation is illuminating. According to Celsus, mortal and immortal beings differ in that it is only the nature of the former which is subjected to 'change and remoulding'. However, for an immortal being, it is to its nature 'to remain the same without alteration.' So if God is immortal – which is taken for granted by Celsus – then he would not be able to undergo change. It is important to note that the change Celsus is talking about here is primarily change from a perfect state of existence to its contrary. For the crucial point in Celsus' theology is that an immortal God cannot be corrupted. This means that God cannot suffer *any* change, but only change contrary to his state. So Celsus' theology is fairly straightforward: (a) God exists in the most perfect state, (b) the realm of corporeal reality demands everything to be subjected to change and remoulding, (c) the divine nature is immortal, and remains self-same without change. On the basis of (a)-(c), Celsus concludes that God must be alien to the realm of

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<sup>96</sup> *PEuch* XXI.2.

<sup>97</sup> 'Let us grant, again, that we turn away others from Stoic physicians because they think that God is corruptible (φθαρτὸν), and affirm that His essence is a material substance (τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ λεγόντων σῶμα), which is entirely changeable and subject to alteration and transformation (τρέπτὸν δι' ὅλων καὶ ἀλλοιωτὸν καὶ μεταβλητὸν), and believe that at some times everything is destroyed and God alone left.'

<sup>98</sup> *Rep.* 380d.

corporeal reality because otherwise God's perfect incorruptibility would be compromised and he would be subjected to change contrary to his perfect state.

Celsus' first premise sets out a 'grammar of divinity' clearly grounded on Plato's second rule in the *Republic*.<sup>99</sup> He was simply drawing out the implication of this premise for God's relations to the corporeal world. Origen's response to Celsus' reasoning is revealing. On the one hand, Origen argues that Celsus' methodological principle is entirely right – an immortal, self-same God cannot suffer any change from good to bad, from beautiful to shameful, etc. In other words, Origen agrees with Celsus concerning the correctness of the 'Platonic' grammar of divinity: God must be self-same. However, Celsus' primary error is his hermeneutics. Like the Christian Stoics and simple anthropomorphites, Celsus' critique of the incarnation has failed to pass beyond the 'letter' of Scriptural language. The Scriptural account of the incarnation did not imply that God was subjected to change when he 'descended'. Rather, God descends in his care for human affairs: 'While remaining unchanged in essence, He comes down in his providence and care'.<sup>100</sup> According to Origen, God's descent into human affairs is to be interpreted *symbolically*.<sup>101</sup> The sense in which God has 'descended' is analogical to the way we commonly say that teachers come down to the level of children for the sake of their education, or wise men coming down to those who are beginners in philosophy. These examples provide a sense of descent without necessarily conveying a physical descent. For Origen, this is how we should understand the language of divine descent in Scripture – for it would make no sense that the God who fills heaven and earth would be limited in his presence to a localised physical place.<sup>102</sup> So if we go beyond the 'letter', the Scriptural account of God's descent in no way connotes the idea that God has subjected his immortal and self-same nature to the conditions of corporeal natures.

Origen repeats the same argument at the level of the doctrine of God.<sup>103</sup> He argues that Celsus has failed to distinguish the Christian doctrine of God from various corporealist accounts. On the one hand, Epicurean doctrines hold that God is compounded of atoms and is liable to dissolution. Epicurean theology thus presents the gods as concerned with throwing off the atoms which may cause their destruction. The idea is that only certain specific atoms would remain stable in composition, whereas others would not, and so it is necessary for the gods to throw off the ones that do not. In virtue of this process, the Epicurean God is subjected to the kind of

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<sup>99</sup> *Rep.* 380d-386c.

<sup>100</sup> *CCels.* IV.14.

<sup>101</sup> *CCels.* IV.12. The verb Origen uses to describe the Christian interpretation is τροπολογούμεν.

<sup>102</sup> See also *PEuch.* XXIII.

<sup>103</sup> *CCels.* IV.14.



change Celsus had in mind ~~in the Epicurean account~~. Similarly, as we have seen, Origen takes Stoic theology to imply that God is corporeal. According to Origen's interpretation, the Stoic God takes on different states during different stages of the dynamic of world-history: at the conflagration stage, God's substance is entirely composed of the ἡγεμονικόν (the guiding principle), whereas at the stage of new world-order, God becomes a part of the cosmos – he is a divine organism which is immanent in the cosmos. So on Origen's reading, the Stoic God is also subjected to the kind of change Celsus had in mind. Origen's criticism of Stoic theology once again shows that he accepts Celsus' first premise: corporealist theologies must be rejected because they violate God's self-same incorruptibility. Celsus' primary error is simply that he lumps corporealists with the Christians.

Contrary to Celsus' judgment, Origen argues that Christians likewise affirm the 'Platonic' grammar of divinity, albeit on the basis of the divine Scriptures.<sup>104</sup> On the basis of Mal 3.6 and Ps 101.8 (LXX), Christians teach 'the true conception of God's nature, as being entirely incorruptible, simple, uncompounded, and indivisible (οὐδὲ γὰρ δεδύνηται οὗτοι τρανῶσαι τὴν φυσικὴν τοῦ θεοῦ ἔννοιαν ὡς πάντῃ ἀφάρτου καὶ ἀπλοῦ καὶ ἀσυνθέτου καὶ ἀδιαιρέτου).'<sup>105</sup> Here, Origen posits divine simplicity in its metaphysical sense simply as a way to affirm divine incorporeality. If the God of the corporealist is liable to dissolution and division, the God of the Christians is simple and free from the possibility of corruption. Further, unlike the Stoics, Christians distinguish simple and intelligible reality from composite and sense-perceptible reality. For Christians, the 'God of the universe is mind... He transcends mind and being, and is simple and invisible and incorporeal'.<sup>106</sup> Origen's doctrine of divine simplicity is thus an attempt to offer an alternative to corporealist theology that would preserve, rather than violate, the 'Platonic' grammar of divinity set out by Celsus.

Origen's polemic against the 'Christian Stoics' is driven by his theological commitment to divine self-sameness.<sup>107</sup> He rejects divine corporeality ultimately because God cannot be perfectly self-same if he is a body.<sup>108</sup> Methodologically, Origen is committed to the requirement that an adequate account of God must satisfy the 'Platonic' rule of divine self-sameness. In light of this

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<sup>104</sup> *CCels.* I.21. As we shall see, these passages will also be important in Origen's discussion of the ethical sense of divine simplicity.

<sup>105</sup> *CCels.* IV.14.

<sup>106</sup> *CCels.* VII. 38.

<sup>107</sup> Origen's commitment to the self-sameness of the First Principle (God) is common in his time. See Alcinous, *Did.* 10.3; Numenius, Fr. 3-8 (des Places).

<sup>108</sup> Origen's critique resembles what we find in Numenius. See Fr. 3, 4a and 4b (des Places) for Numenius' argument that the first principle must not be corporeal.

commitment, *PArch* I.1.6 must be read not merely as an attempt to set out a standard polemical response to ‘Christian Stoic’ theology and hermeneutics. It must also be read as a presentation of the Christian doctrine of God that is fully in line with the Platonic ‘grammar of divinity’.

*Origen’s metaphysics of divine simplicity in PArch I.1.6: Analysis*

A. God as *intellectualis natura simplex*: the philosophical case

The goal of *PArch* I.1.6 is to articulate a clear distinction between simple intellectual existence on the one hand, and composite sense-perceptible existence on the other. For Origen, such a distinction suffices to establish the sense that God is ἁπλοῦς: the *source* of all composite and sense-perceptible realities is a simple (non-composite) intellectual (not perceptible by corporeal senses) existence. The way Origen sets out this distinction is centred on the nature of God’s *operations*. The central question in *PArch* I.1.6 is this: if God is simple, what is the necessary consequence on the nature of his operations? According to Origen, what distinguishes a simple God from ordinary corporeal existences is that divine operations suffer no delay. Hence God’s operations are not subjected to any kind of successive developments.<sup>109</sup>

Origen’s argument is grounded on two basic premises about the divine nature. First, God does not require physical space for his acts because he is not conditioned by the limitations imposed by corporeality. Second, God does not need any physical magnitudes in order to act.<sup>110</sup> The background here is no doubt the method of abstraction in Middle-Platonism.<sup>111</sup> This negative theology is strongly influenced by a theological reading of the first hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*. According to this dialogue, what is truly one is that which is not many and without parts.<sup>112</sup> This brings about a series of implications, of which four are particularly relevant to

<sup>109</sup> As we shall see in Chapter 3, this claim is also found in Irenaeus. According to Irenaeus, God’s intellectual operations differ from human intellectual operations in that God’s operations do not consist of several stages according to an order of development. This is the case because God, unlike humans, is not composite, and consequently ‘sees in the same way that he hears’ and ‘hears in the same way that he sees’ (*Haer.* II.13.8). Origen’s point is in essence the same; but he elaborates on this point with much greater philosophical sophistication than Irenaeus.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Now mind does not need physical space in which to move and operate, nor does it need a magnitude discernible by the senses, nor bodily shape of colour, nor anything else whatever like these, which are suitable to bodies and matter.’ *PArch* I.1.6.

<sup>111</sup> See Alcinous, *Did.* 10.4-5; Clement of Alexandria, *Str.* V.11-12; For background of “abstraction”, see Raoul Mortley, “The Fundamentals of the Via Negativa,” *The American Journal of Philology* 103, no. 4 (1982): 435–39; See especially Henny Fiskå Hägg, *Clement of Alexandria and the Beginnings of Christian Apophaticism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 71–133 for a very helpful general introduction to the Middle-Platonic doctrine of God.

<sup>112</sup> *Parm.* 137c-d.

Origen's argument in *PArch* I.1.6. Non-composition (a) is without limits<sup>113</sup>, (b) has no extension or shape<sup>114</sup>, (c) is nowhere (e.g. not in physical space)<sup>115</sup>, and (d) is not in time (cannot be or become older or younger)<sup>116</sup>. Consequently, if the simple is to remain truly one, we must abstract these restrictions from it. In Middle-Platonism, this method of abstraction is often combined with the claim that God is mind. Taken together, Middle-Platonic theology asserts that God is a simple mind who is without limits, extension, and shape. Moreover, he is not restricted in physical space or time. The result of this method is a way to establish the content of divine incorporeality: God is incorporeal in that he is not restricted by any spatio-temporal limits. While Origen does not pursue this method of abstraction rigorously, nevertheless the considerations in *PArch* I.1.6 suggest that he is relying on negative theology to provide a concrete notion of divine incorporeality.

With this background in mind, we turn to the details of Origen's argument. Origen spends the bulk of *PArch* I.1.6 establishing the plausibility of the two central premises about the nature of the mind. By way of comparison between the divine mind and human minds, each premise provides a way to illustrate Origen's thesis that if God is simple, then his operations must be perfectly effectual. First, Origen argues that mind does not require physical space to move because by its very nature, intellectual operations are not affected by physical space. Consequently, we should conceive an intellectual existence as possessing its own sphere of operations unaffected by physical restrictions. For Origen, this is evident even from the nature of human minds:

That mind needs no space in which to move according to its own nature is certain even from the evidence of our own mind. For if this abides in its own proper sphere and nothing occurs from any cause to enfeeble it, it will never be at all retarded by reason of differences of place from acting in conformity with its own movements; nor on the other hand will it gain any increase or accession of speed from the peculiar nature of any place.<sup>117</sup>

Origen gives an example to illustrate his point. He asks his reader to consider men travelling by sea in a boat tossed by the waters. Now in this specific location, our minds would seem to be less effectual in its operations compared to when we are on land. In this instance, does it mean that

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<sup>113</sup> *Parm.* 137d.

<sup>114</sup> *Parm.* 137d-138a.

<sup>115</sup> *Parm.* 138a-b.

<sup>116</sup> *Parm.* 140e-141d.

<sup>117</sup> *PArch* I.1.6.

the difference of physical place has affected the way our mind functions? For Origen, the answer is no. The difference in this case is not caused by the nature of the particular physical locations, but by the movement and disturbance of the *body*. The man traveling on sea suffers diminishing mental capacities because it is against the nature of the human body to live on sea. Consequently, while at sea, the man is not able to sustain his intellectual operations as on land because his body, to which his mind is conjoined, suffers diminishing ability to enable the mind to function freely. Therefore we must distinguish the following two accounts:

- (1) The human mind functions less well at sea than on land because intellectual operations are prone to be affected by physical locations
- (2) The human mind functions less well at sea than on land because it is conjoined with the body, and the body's capacity to facilitate intellectual operations *is* prone to be affected by physical locations.

The difference between the two is where we identify the cause of the discrepancy between our mental activities on land and at sea. Origen argues that the cause of the discrepancy lies in the body being affected by physical locations, and not the mind. As a result, in the case of the human mind, it appears that intellectual operations are affected by physical locations, but the discrepancy is actually due to the fact that humans are *mind-body composites*. On the basis of this analysis, Origen draws from this illustration the conclusion that even for human minds, intellectual operations are not by nature affected by physical locations. Now God, however, differs from human minds precisely in that he is a simple mind. Here, Origen provides an argument for divine simplicity:

God, who is the beginning of all things, must not be regarded as a composite being, lest perchance we find that the elements, out of which everything that is called composite has been composed, are prior to the first principle himself.<sup>118</sup>

As source and creator, God is the beginning of all things. This implies that God must be the *first* with respect to all things—he is the origin and source of everything that come after him. According to Origen, God is most appropriately called *monas* or *henas* because it is the first that is truly one and single. Anything other than the first is merely one amongst many. Given that God is the first, there can be absolutely nothing prior to God. For Origen, God's priority leads straight-forwardly to the claim that he must be simple. We can try to fill in the details behind this logic. If God is composed of parts, then each of the parts would be prior to God. The implicit

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<sup>118</sup> *PArb* I.1.6

assumption not mentioned by Origen is that if something is a composite, then its existence as a whole is posterior to the individual parts because the whole is dependent on the putting together of all the parts.<sup>119</sup> This means that the individual parts need to exist prior to the composite whole not merely temporally, but causally. Consequently, the parts have a causal priority over the composite whole. On the basis of this logic then, to say that God is composite would mean that he is not the *first* principle, the source and fount of everything, since his parts would have causal priority over him. Thus if one grants that God is the beginning of all things, then he must be simple. But if God is simple, then he is not a composite of mind and body. Now as we have seen, the only restriction imposed by physical locations on human intellectual operations is in virtue of the fact that humans are mind-body composites. Physical locations can only affect intellectual operations through affecting the body that is conjoined with the acting mind. But even this restriction does not apply to God because he is a simple mind and not a mind-body composite. Thus Origen concludes that God's operations must be purely effectual and suffer no delay from restrictions imposed by physical locations.

Origen's second argument is similar to the first. Over and above being unaffected by physical locations, he argues that minds also do not require physical magnitude to operate. In fact, elsewhere Origen affirms that mind by its very nature is free from any corporeal attributes whatsoever: physical magnitudes, bodily shapes, colours or anything of this kind. Just as mental operations act in a sphere distinct from physical space, so mental magnitudes that measure the strength of intellectual operations are also distinct from physical magnitudes. All magnitudes that measure and circumscribe bodies are therefore not applicable to intellectual existence. Unlike the eye which grows in physical magnitudes – it expands and contracts – the mind does not grow in physical magnitudes when it operates. Instead, mind admits *intellectual* magnitudes. Mind grows with respect to intellectual magnitudes as supposed to physical sense of growth (e.g. aging). For example, mind does not grow as one ages physically. Rather, it grows through education. Origen's point here is that the growth of mental magnitudes is not necessarily concomitant to the growth of physical magnitudes (e.g. age in this example). Once again, Origen proceeds to discuss the case of human minds where the independence of mind from physical magnitudes is somewhat impeded. This impediment is once again accounted for by the fact that humans are mind-body composites. While in principle one could grow in intellectual magnitudes entirely free from physical magnitudes, nevertheless humans are not able to carry out from birth the necessary exercises that would sharpen the power of the mind. Origen argues that human bodily parts are

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<sup>119</sup> This is precisely what we should expect from *Phae.* 92b-c.

weak in the first instance with respect to their ability to enable the mind to grow effectively in intellectual magnitudes. Origen does not provide a concrete example but one could easily imagine what he had in mind. Consider a child who gets physically tired after long hours of mathematical exercises. 'The intellectual exercise tires her body, making her not 'able to endure the force of the mind's working.' Or consider a baby who is not yet able to receive verbal instructions. In this case, its physical immaturity prevents it from receiving instructions necessary for growth in intellectual magnitudes. Origen's point is that in the case of humans, our physical conditions do indeed affect our capacity to grow intellectually because we are mind-body composites. Consequently, in the case of human minds, there is a correlation between the growth of intellectual and physical magnitudes (e.g. ability to function without tiredness for long hours and age in our examples). But the human case notwithstanding, the distinction between intellectual and physical attributes implies that it is in principle possible to envisage a mind that grows entirely without restriction by physical magnitudes. God is precisely such a mind because he is a *simple* intellectual existence. According to Origen, only the divine nature has the privileged to exist entirely without corporeality. Divine simplicity implies that God is able to operate entirely independently from physical magnitudes. Without the restrictions coming from being a mind-body composite, it is thus possible to conceive God as a perfect mind who does not grow: he admits 'no addition whatsoever' and cannot possess 'a more or a less'.

I have argued previously that Origen's criticism of corporealist theology is grounded on his concern that such a theology compromises divine self-sameness. For Origen, the metaphysically simple divine nature is a helpful characterisation of God because only a simple intellectual existence would remain perfectly self-same. As we have seen, God's operations do not develop in the sense that it undergoes successive stages. Moreover, he does not admit in himself a more or less. Divine simplicity in its metaphysical sense expresses a sense of completeness or finality in God. There is no possibility of God changing from one state to a better or worse state. If God's operation can be delayed – not achieved immediately – then it would appear that there is one time when God is lacking in something and then at another time, he has gained something in himself. But to admit this addition would violate God's perfect self-sameness. Instead of being a single and simple existence, God would be admitting diverse characteristics that are not perfectly one. So if God is perfectly self-same, it is then necessary that his operations are perfectly effectual without delay—in other words, his operations must be of a purely intellectual kind, unhindered by corporeal constraints. The exposition of divine simplicity in its metaphysical sense in *PArch* I.1.6 therefore ultimately reflects Origen's desire to set out an alternative to corporealist theology that would satisfy Celsus' 'Platonic' grammar of divinity.

## B. God as *intellectualis natura simplex*: the exegetical case

We have now seen Origen's philosophical case for divine simplicity. But our presentation will be incomplete if we leave out the crucial exegetical case. As I have highlighted previously, Origen's concern for divine incorporeality in *PArch* I.1 is occasioned by an exegetical concern to interpret Deut. 4.24, Jn 4.24 and 1 Jn 1.5. For Origen, divine simplicity is closely grounded on the teachings of the Scriptures. Origen argues that the clause 'God is Spirit' (Jn 4.24) implies divine incorporeality. According to *PArch* I.1.4, there is no doubt from Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman that God is incorporeal. In other words, Origen argues that the doctrine of divine incorporeality established in *PArch* I.1.6 is also a Scriptural teaching. He writes:

It was this belief of the woman, who thought that God would be worshipped rightly or wrongly by Jews in Jerusalem or by Samaritans in Mount Gerizim because of some special privilege attaching to the material places, that the Savior contradicts by saying that the man who desires to seek for God must abandon all idea of material places. These are his words: "The hour cometh, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father neither in Jerusalem nor in this mountain. God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." See, too, how appropriately he associated truth with spirit, calling God spirit to distinguish him from bodies, and truth to distinguish him from a shadow or an image.

Origen's argument is based on a reading of Jn 4.24 in light of the immediate context of the whole chapter. The Samaritan woman believes that right worship is attached to a material place. On Origen's reading, Jesus' response to her goes beyond simply pointing out her faulty understanding of worship. Rather, Jesus' diagnosis is that the Samaritan has a materialistic understanding of God from which her faulty belief about worship is derived. Jesus' affirmation that God is spirit thus unmistakably suggests that the divine nature must be distinguished from corporeal natures. Consequently, Origen takes Jn 4.24 as a clear exegetical foundation for the metaphysical doctrine of divine simplicity set out in *PArch* I.1.6.

The use of Jn 4.24 as Scriptural evidence for divine incorporeality only reveals part of Origen's exegetical case. Ultimately, Origen's case rests on his argument that the Greek philosophical term *ἄσώματον* is found in Scripture under the name *ἀόρατον* (invisible). While the two terms differ obviously in name, nevertheless Origen argues that they are identical in sense: both *ἄσώματον* and *ἀόρατον* signify the reality of 'any substance in which we can discern neither

colour nor shape nor possibility of touch nor size, a substance perceptible to the mind alone'.<sup>120</sup> For Origen, there is ample Scriptural evidence that there is indeed such a correspondence.

But these assertions [viz. divine incorporeality] may perhaps seem to be less authoritative to those who desire to be instructed in divine things from the holy scriptures and who set to have it proved to them from that source how God's nature surpasses the nature of bodies. See then, whether the apostle, too, does not say the same thing when he speaks as follows about Christ: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1.15). It is not, as some suppose, that God's nature is visible to one and invisible to others; for the apostle did not say "the image of God who is invisible" to men or "invisible" to sinners, but he makes an absolutely unvarying declaration about God's very nature in these words, "image of the invisible God." And John, too, when he says in the gospel, "No one hath seen God at any time" (Jn 1.18), plainly declares to all who are capable of understanding, that there is no existence to which God is visible; not as if he were one who is visible by nature and yet eludes and escapes me gaze of his creatures because of their frailty, but that he is in his nature impossible to be seen.<sup>121</sup>

Origen's argument here is that Scripture (Col 1.15) did not apply the term *ἀόρατον* to God in a relative sense. God is not merely visible to one and invisible to another. Rather, *ἀόρατον* is applied to God in an absolute sense, meaning that God by his very nature is invisible; he does not possess a nature that admits of being seen. That which is visible can be seen in no other way than 'by its shape and size and colour, which are properties of bodies'.<sup>122</sup> Thus if Scripture declares that the divine nature is invisible, then it is equivalent to stating the metaphysical conclusions we have seen in *PArb* I.1.6: God is incorporeal in that he is a simple intellectual existence. As we can see, Origen is clearly aware that the philosophical case he sets out for this doctrine will not do for some Christians. But in Origen's mind, an exegetical foundation for the doctrine is clearly available if one carefully attends to Scripture. As a result, his metaphysics of divine simplicity is not simply a piece of anti-corporealist polemic. Nor does it merely aim to satisfy the Platonic grammar of divinity. For Origen, most importantly, it is taught by the divine Scriptures.

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<sup>120</sup> *PArb* IV.3.15.

<sup>121</sup> *PArb* I.1.8.

<sup>122</sup> *PArb* II.4.3.



## THE ETHICAL SIMPLICITY OF THE DIVINE CHARACTER

Origen's metaphysical reasoning for divine simplicity is not surprising in light of what we have seen in the Apologists. God's nature must be simple because he is perfectly self-same without the possibility of change. Consequently, God must be incorporeal. Divine simplicity in the metaphysical sense serves to differentiate the perfect divine nature from imperfect created natures. But now we turn to the second aspect of Origen's understanding of divine simplicity that is absent in the Apologists, namely, as an ethical doctrine concerning God's character. In Origen's works, I shall demonstrate that there is (a) an ethical sense of oneness, as well as (b) an interconnection between unity, unchangeability and ethical purity when it comes to God. My claim that Origen has an 'ethical doctrine of divine simplicity' is thus grounded on the observation that Origen's application of the ethical sense of oneness to God parallels Plato's account of divine *simplicity* in the *Republic*. In the final section of this chapter, we shall see that Origen's reflections on the ethical sense of oneness is explicitly linked to what we have seen in the last section, namely, the metaphysical sense of simplicity/non-composition. It is only with the final step that I will complete my argument for the central claim that Origen's doctrine of divine simplicity is a metaphysical-ethical *synthesis*.

### *The ethical sense of one and many*

In Origen, the basic contrast between one and many acquires a deeper meaning. Origen conceives the significance of oneness and multiplicity beyond what we might call their *literal* sense. He notes that the use of the singular and plural in Scripture has a more profound *ethical* sense than the common literal sense that points merely towards whether there is a single subject or a collection of entities in question. As a result, it is possible to conceive a mismatch between the two senses. Those who are virtuous and righteous are properly described by Scripture as *one* because they best display the qualities associated with unity. Ethical oneness can be attributed not only to one righteous person, but also to many righteous persons even though they are multiple in the literal sense. In contrast, those who are evil and sinful are properly called *many* because it is in the midst of such men where the characteristics of multiplicity are found. And in a similar way, the ethical sense of multiplicity can be attributed not only to many sinners, but also to one sinner where the latter is singular in the literal sense. We shall denote the deeper meaning of one and many as the *ethical* meaning for the obvious reason that it is discerned with respect to goodness (or the lack thereof).

Origen's corpus has no systematic account of the ethical sense of the one and many. Rather, he develops the theme *en passant* primarily in his exegetical commentaries and homilies. The differentiation between the two senses arises out of Origen's close attention to the grammatical structure of Scripture, especially on the use of the singular and plural, in order to make sense of Scripture as a unity.<sup>123</sup> Our approach will therefore be focusing on how Origen's reflections on the theme arising out of various exegetical problems.

#### A. The basic scheme

A helpful starting point is a fragment in which Origen comments on the significance of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:

“Come, let us go down and confound their language, that they may not understand one language of his neighbor.” (Gen 11.7) The confusion of tongues is a sign of evil, whereas this is truly a sign of virtue, when “there was one heart and one soul of all believers.” (Acts 4.32) Thus you will find, observing the Scriptures, that wherever there is a multitude of numbers (πλῆθος ἀριθμοῦ), that wherever there is schism (σχίσμα), that wherever there is division (διαιρέσις) and internal discord (διαφωνία), and the like, it is a sign of evil (κακία). But where there is unity (ἐνότης), and harmony (ὁμόνοια), and many miracles in the Word, there virtue (ἀρετή) is made known.<sup>124</sup>

This fragment presents the basic pattern of Origen's ethical interpretation of the one and many. When multiplicity is indicated in Scripture by the use of the plural, frequently Origen suggests an underlying ethical sense beyond its literal meaning. The ethical sense is then drawn upon by Origen to unearth a deeper theological meaning in a given passage. In this fragment, Origen picks up on the numerical plurality of languages (tongues) found in Gen. 11. God's decision to confuse the tongues of men indicates the presence of evil on earth because his act results in a multitude of numbers (πλῆθος ἀριθμοῦ) – a reality that is referred to in the plural. According to Origen, numerical plurality always indicates evil in Scripture. This might sound like a strange claim until we understand what Origen means by multiplicity here. For Origen, multiplicity is always associated with a group of terms that connote a lack of unity amongst many beings or things. ‘Schism’, ‘division’ and ‘internal discord’ all refer to the situation where many beings or things are not held together by a more fundamental unity. Hence for Origen, we need to note that the kind

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<sup>123</sup> In my view, Origen's basic understanding on this topic remains consistent throughout his works. The examples discussed in this part of the chapter will provide evidence for this claim since I draw on a variety of writings across genre and time of composition.

<sup>124</sup> *SelGn* (PG 12: 112).

of multiplicity associated with evil is not just a *literal* plurality, but a specific kind of plurality where a lack of ultimate unity amongst the multitude is present. This interpretation is verified by Origen's contrast between the multitude of numbers and the description of the disciples in Acts 4.32, a paradigmatic Scriptural account of unity in Origen's exegesis. Acts 4.32 certainly refers to many believers. But they are described as having 'one heart and one soul'. So while Acts 4.32 refers to many disciples (a literal plurality), these disciples are characterised as one (a non-literal unity) by Scripture. The contrast envisaged by Origen between Acts 4 and Gen 11 confirms our interpretation that the kind of multiplicity associated by Origen with evil is one where there is a multitude without an ultimate bond of unity. Similarly, we can infer that the kind of unity associated with goodness and virtue is not to be understood as an absolute absence of literal multiplicity, but an absence of the kind of multiplicity wherein there is no ultimate bond of harmony and unity. It is therefore important to posit a distinction between the ethical and the literal sense of the one and many in Origen's thought. The former is much more specific than the latter.

This fragment on Genesis illustrates the basic contours of Origen's ethical interpretation of the one and many. On the one hand, perfect reality characterised by virtue possesses unity and harmony. Unity in this ethical sense is reflected by those who are virtuous. In no way, however, is this unity restricted in its application to single subjects – those who are one in the literal sense. On the other hand, imperfect reality is many, characterised by schism, division and internal conflicts. Multiplicity in this ethical sense is reflected by those who are sinful. As we shall see, the application of multiplicity in the ethical sense is also not restricted to multiple subjects (many in the literal sense). Thus both one and many in their ethical senses are to be distinguished from their literal counterparts. We can now turn to examine how Origen applies this basic framework in relation to three themes: Word, man, and finally, God. In each case, Origen marks the distinction between the perfect and the imperfect by drawing on the ethical sense of the one and many.

#### B. εἷς λόγος—the one Word and many words

According to Origen, the one Word of God stands in contrast with the multitude of words in Scripture. In order to understand this contrast, it is necessary to differentiate between the ethical and literal senses of the one and many. In a fragment on the *Commentary on John* Book V preserved in the *Philocalia*, Origen wrestles with the spiritual appropriateness of his endeavour to compose many books for his commentary. It seems that certain passages in Scripture do not recommend the making of many books. In Eccl 12.12, we read: 'My Son, beware of making many

books.’ Further, Prov 10.19 states that ‘in the multitude of words you shall not escape sin, but he who restrains his lips is prudent.’ In light of these passages, Origen poses the question: what is the ‘multitude of words’ that Scripture condemns? He argues that we need to inquire about the meaning of this phrase carefully because we cannot take it literally to mean more than one word. This interpretation is absurd because if this was true, then even men who were speaking ‘holy and saving words’ will not escape the condemnation issued by Scripture. In this case, Solomon and the apostle Paul would be considered guilty of sin since both have spoken many words in their profitable teaching.<sup>125</sup>

How do we resolve this problem? Origen argues that we need to consider the ‘multitude of words’ in its meaning beyond its literal sense. According to Origen, on the one hand there is the perfect Word of God which is not multiple. This is because Scripture has deliberately referred to this Word in the singular and not in the plural. In Jn 1.1, we read that ‘in the beginning was *the Word*’, not ‘words’ or ‘a multitude of words’. However, the fact that the Word is one does not mean that it is free from all kinds of multiplicity: ‘there is one Word which is associated with many points of view (λόγος γὰρ εἷς συνεστὼς ἐκ πλειόνων θεωρημάτων)’. Origen is well aware that ‘the Word’ can have a variety of meanings. But this multiplicity does not compromise its oneness, because ‘each of these meanings is a part of the whole Word (ἕκαστον θεώρημα μέρος ἐστὶ τοῦ ὅλου λόγου)’. So the Word of God is one in a sense that does not exclude multiplicity absolutely. On the other hand, according to Origen, anything other than the single Word of God is to be referred to in the plural – they are words (*logoi*). This multiplicity found in the *logoi* is contrasted with the oneness displayed in the case of the Word. *Logoi* possess a multiplicity which does not possess a final unity like the Word of God:

For the unit can nowhere be found, nor can harmony and unity, but because they are torn with mutual conflict their unity has perished; and they are split into many parts [or: lit. They have become numbers], perhaps infinitely numerous (οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ ἡ μονάς, καὶ οὐδαμοῦ τὸ σύμφωνον καὶ ἓν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὸ διεσπᾶσθαι καὶ μάχεσθαι τὸ ἓν ἀπ’ ἐκείνων ἀπώλετο, καὶ γεγονασιν ἀριθμοί, καὶ τάχα ἀριθμοὶ ἄπειροι).<sup>126</sup>

Origen argues that the kind of unity and multiplicity involved in the case of Word and words should not be taken as implying an absolute exclusion of the opposite. The Word of God is one even though it admits multiple meanings. It is even described as having these multiple meanings

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<sup>125</sup> *Philoc.* V.2-3.

<sup>126</sup> *Philoc.* V.4.

as parts (μέρος). The problem with the *logoi* is that we find a kind of multiplicity that is full of conflict and division, whereas the one Word possesses multiple meanings related in unity. Thus for Origen, the difference between the Word of God and the *logoi* comes down to the fact that while the former possesses a final unity amidst multiplicity, the latter does not. On the basis of this, the ‘multitude of words’ in the warnings found in Eccl 12.12 and Prov 10.19 cannot refer generally to the literal multiple quantity of words.

Instead, Origen proposes that the multiplicity in the multitude of words is to be interpreted according to its ethical sense. Many godly men spoke many words but that is not a sign of their sinfulness. This is because what differentiates the singular word and the multitude of words resides in the *nature* of the words uttered. So even though many words are spoken, whether these words are to be described in the singular or plural depends on whether there is a final unity and harmony within the nature of these words. If many words are spoken in accordance with godliness and truth, then even though there is a multitude of words, they can be called *one word* (εἰς λόγος) collectively:

according to this we may say that he who utters anything whatsoever contrary to godliness speaks much, while he who speaks the things of the truth, even though he speak so exhaustively as to omit nothing, even speaks one word, and the saints, making the one Word their constant aim, do not fall into the vice of much speaking.<sup>127</sup>

Hence the problem Scripture raises regarding the making of many books and the speaking of many words is not tied up with the literal speech of many words. Rather, the problematic multiplicity pertains to the ethical-spiritual nature of the words in question. If the words reflect the truth and godliness, then even though there are many words, they are appropriately described as being one Word.

In support of this understanding, Origen highlights that Scripture is full of examples where the one and many are not used in their literal but their ethical sense. For instance, what does Christ mean when he asked his disciples to ‘search the Scripture’ in order to find his presence?<sup>128</sup> Does he mean that they should find him in a specific book of Scripture? This does not make sense, Origen argues, because Christ commended his disciples to find him in all the

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<sup>127</sup> *Philoc.* V.4.

<sup>128</sup> Jn 5.39.

books and not only in a particular portion.<sup>129</sup> According to Origen, the many books of Scripture are called one because the nature of the words contained therein reflects the nature of perfect reality – a reality ultimately characterised by unity in truth and goodness. So while there are many books of Scripture – the Pentateuch, Prophets, Psalms, etc. – we are to find Christ in *one* book. Further, Scripture also describes the opposition between the one word and the multitude of words: the holy words are contained in one book, whereas many books are brought to those judged by God.<sup>130</sup> Thus Scripture teaches that the singular Word and the multitude of words contain a deeper ethical sense. The basic principle is clear: perfect words which are godly and virtuous should be described in the singular, whereas imperfect words which are ungodly and evil should be described in the plural, denoting their multiplicity which characterises the division and internal conflict inherent in their nature. Consequently, we should not take the meaning of the ‘multitude of words’ literally to imply that the making of many books will lead to sin. Rather, it is the making of imperfect words that Scripture forbids.

### C. *Vir Unus* – singular and plural pronouns in Scripture

The contrast between one and many in the ethical sense also applies in the context of anthropology. According to Origen, Scripture has numerous examples where the perfect and imperfect natures of man are contrasted by the deliberate use of singular and plural pronouns. In a number of Scriptural passages, Origen observes that there is a shift in pronouns from the singular to the plural *for the same subject* in question. Instead of interpreting these changes as textual inconsistencies, he argues that we should interpret them according to the ethical sense of one and many. The contrast between singular and plural pronouns is not a mistake but a deliberate device to teach a theological lesson. When a plural pronoun is used, Scripture is pointing to the imperfect nature of those who are addressed. But when a singular pronoun is used, Scripture is stressing the perfect nature of those who are addressed. So the shift of pronouns in Scripture for Origen contains a significant lesson about the distinct nature of perfect and imperfect man.

A number of examples illustrate how Origen carries this exegesis out. In the ninth homily on Ezekiel, he observes that Ezek 16 seems to be making the same rebuke to the same addressee – Jerusalem – and so it seems that Scripture is repeating the same message for no good reasons.

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<sup>129</sup> Origen makes this point on the basis of his reading of Ps 39.7 (LXX) as spoken by Jesus himself: ‘in the volume of the Book it is written of me’. Origen provides numerous other examples to argue that Scripture itself utilises the sense of the one book which goes beyond its literal meaning of numerical oneness. See *Philoc.* V.5.

<sup>130</sup> Dan 7.10. See *Philoc.* V.5-7 for Origen’s full argument on the point that one can find in Scripture the opposition between the one and many, understood in the ethical sense.

However, he observes that in the chapter, the pronoun shifts from the singular (Ezek 16.3) to the plural (Ezek 16.45) in God's address to Jerusalem. According to Origen, this shift of pronouns is not accidental:

There the words are, as it were, addressed to one person; here as if to many....When sin is diffused and evil goes forth more widely and sinner share their sins among themselves, then there is not a single sinner, but in one there are many, just as in the beginning when there was a commencement of transgressing, there were not yet so many as the multitudes that now exist.<sup>131</sup>

So even though Ezek 16 is addressing one person (Jerusalem, interpreted figuratively) in the literal sense, nonetheless the plural pronoun is used to indicate the multiplicity contained in her sinful nature. In the one sinner there are paradoxically many sinners because of the contagiousness of sin. The nature of sin is that it multiplies and spreads. The multitude in question here is clearly used by Origen beyond the literal sense. The one sinner can be called many because of the multitude that is characteristic of sin itself. Here we have a reversal of what we have seen previously, where Origen points out that even though literal multiplicity (of meanings) is present in the Word of God, yet there is an ultimate unity which warrants the Word to be called one according to its perfection. In the passage on Ezekiel, even though there is literal singularity, nonetheless the one sinner contains potentially many sinners in herself. Hence Jerusalem is addressed by the plural pronoun according to her sinfulness. Once again, Origen contends that the multiplicity in question is to be understood with reference to the ethical and not the literal sense. Just as the ethical sense of oneness can accommodate literal multiplicity, so the ethical sense of multiplicity can accommodate literal singularity.

In *HomEz* 9.2, Origen elaborates further on the nature of sin and virtue on the basis of the ethical sense of the one and many. The language here is very close to what we found in the Genesis fragment: imperfect reality is associated with multiplicity, schisms, heresies and dissensions whereas perfect reality is associated with solitariness and unity. Origen's language is even more striking here than in the Genesis fragment: 'the beginning of all evils is multiplicity'. Acts 4.32 is once again the paradigmatic account of perfect unity. What is new in this passage is that Origen seems to elaborate on the dynamic process of salvation in relation to the ethical sense of one and many:

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<sup>131</sup> *HomEz* 9.1.

If we are to be saved, we must in unity “become perfect in the same mind and in the same thought” (1 Cor 1.10). We must be “one body and one spirit” (Eph 4.4). But if we are such that unity does not circumscribe us...and we are still being torn apart and divided by evil; we are not going to be where those ones are who are drawn back into union. For as the Father and the Son are one (Jn 10.30), so those who have one Spirit are confined into a union. For the Saviour says: “I and the Father, we are one” (Jn 10.30), and “Holy Father, just as I and you are one, that even they may be one in us” (Jn 17.11-12). And one reads in the Apostle: “Until we all attain to the perfect man and to the measure of the age of fulness in the unity of Christ”; and again: “Until we all attain to the unity of the body and spirit of Christ.” (Eph 4.13) From this it is signified that virtue makes one from many, and that we need to become one through it and to flee from the multitude.<sup>132</sup>

According to Origen, unity characterises the soteriological end for the believer, as indicated by Scripture. Thus even though the sinner possesses multiplicity which is characterised by division, through virtue sinners may flee multiplicity and *become one*. This is possible because ‘virtue makes one from many.’ So in Origen’s soteriological vision, it is possible to overcome one’s sinful nature, understood as multitude in the ethical sense, through virtue, understood as unity in the ethical sense. Thus Origen’s ethical interpretation of the one and many has a clear soteriological dimension. While sin is indicated by multitude, it is possible to cross from multiplicity to unity through virtue.

This soteriological dimension is more clearly seen in another example where Origen interprets the shift of pronoun on the basis of the ethical sense of the one and many. This passage is from the lost *Commentary on Hosea* which is preserved in *Philocalia* VIII. Commenting on Hos 12.4, Origen notes a similar example of shift in pronouns, this time proceeding from the plural to the singular. Again, Origen contends that this shift is not to be taken as an error in the copy but rather to be understood as a theological lesson on the nature of perfect and imperfect man. He turns to Gen 2.16-17 to note that a similar pattern in the shift of pronoun is observed.<sup>133</sup> In that passage, God is giving the commands to Adam and he began by addressing him in the singular when the positive commands were given: ‘of every tree in the garden you may freely eat’ (Gen 2.16). However, when God turns to the negative commands – what Adam is forbidden to eat – he addresses Adam in the plural: ‘of the tree of the knowledge of good and

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<sup>132</sup> *HomEz* 9.2.

<sup>133</sup> *Philoc.* VIII.2.



evil, ye shall not eat of it: for in the day that ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die.’ (Gen 2.17) Origen argues that the reason for the shift from the singular to the plural is that, in the case of the positive commands, God is speaking of the way which would preserve the life of those who obeys it. As a result, those who would keep the positive commands are one in virtue of their single-minded obedience to God’s command, though they might be many (as seen in the example of Acts 4.32). However, in the case of the negative commands, God is speaking of laws regarding sin and transgression. The nature of such things is, as we have seen, associated with multiplicity and so God refers to those who would sin and transgress his laws in the plural. By drawing on the Genesis passage, Origen is simply establishing the principle that when Scripture is speaking of realities related to goodness and virtue, the singular is used, whereas when it is speaking of realities related to sin and transgression, the plural is used. He then returns to the Hosea passage and establishes a soteriological thrust to this principle:

And so it is with the present passage. When they still weep and make supplication to God, the plural is used –“They wept and made supplication to me”; but when they find God, He no longer uses the plural –“There He spake, not with them,” but with him. For by finding God and by hearing His Word, they have already become one (ἐν γεγόνασιν). For the individual when he sins is one of many, severed from God and divided, his unity gone (ὁ γὰρ εἷς ὅτε ἀμαρτάνει πολλοστός ἐστιν, ἀποσχιζόμενος ἀπὸ θεοῦ καὶ μεριζόμενος καὶ τῆς ἐνότητος ἐκπεσών); but the many who follow the commandments of God are one man.<sup>134</sup>

This is a remarkable passage. Those who are separated from God – who are fallen into sin and transgression – are addressed in the plural because this indicates their true nature. A sinner was addressed in the plural previously because he has been severed from God, the source of unity and oneness; the unity of the person is gone. Nevertheless the situation changes when he finds God and hears the Word of God. This encounter with God effects a transformation from the many to one, such that now the man is called *one man*. So those who found God have become one (ἐν γεγόνασιν). Thus while it is the case that perfect and imperfect realities are sharply distinguished by Origen using the contrast between the one and many, the man who is many can overcome his imperfect multiplicity through a proper encounter with God, the perfect source of unity.

So far, we have seen many examples where Origen utilises the ethical sense of the one and the many for solving exegetical problems. But we might still find this ethical sense to be rather

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<sup>134</sup> *Philoc.* VII.3.

abstract: what does it mean to say that the perfect righteous man is one, whereas the imperfect sinful man is many? What does it mean to say that an imperfect man possesses multiplicity in his nature? In *Homilies on 1 Samuel*, Origen provides us with some further clarifications which would clarify the meaning of the *vir unus*. Here, Origen comments yet again on the use of pronouns in Scripture, this time in 1 Sam 1.1. In this instance, however, the issue is not a shift between the plural and the singular, but between the variants in the various copies of the text. It seems that while some copies have ‘There was a certain man’ (*erat vir quidam*), other copies have ‘there was one man’ (*erat vir unus*). Origen argues in favour of the latter on the basis of the same ethical interpretation of the one and many. According to Origen, it is more correct to adhere to *erat vir unus* because – we should be familiar with this argument by now – Scripture here is using *unus* to teach a lesson about the nature of the righteous man. Origen argues that *erat vir unus* is used here as praise of the righteous man, whose nature stands in contrast with the sinful man. It is here that he makes clear what it means for the imperfect sinful man to be many:

We, who are sinners until now, are not able to acquire the title of praise, because every one of us is not one, but many. For consider me, now the face of such a man: sometimes angry, sometimes sad again, shortly afterwards returning to joy again and then troubled again, and then returning to be relaxed. At one time concerning about divine things and acts of eternal life, and shortly after, however, striving towards things pertaining to greed or worldly glory. You see, like the one who is thought to be one, he is not one, but there seem to be many persons in him, as many as behaviours, because even according to the scriptures, “the fools changes like the moon.” (Sir 27.11 LXX)<sup>135</sup>

According to Origen, the sinner is many because he is subjected to changes which turn him from one state to another. *Prima facie*, it might seem innocent to be subjected to change. What is the problem with change *per se*? But once again, we need to attend to Origen’s understanding of change. His stress here is not merely on the possibility of any change, but on the possibility of changing from one state to its contrary. The sinner is many because he is subjected to many states which could be contrary to one another. At one time I could be happy and yet sad at

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<sup>135</sup> *Hom1S* I.4: Nos, qui adhuc peccatores sumus, non possumus istum titulum laudis acquirere, quia unusquisque nostrum non est unus, sed multi. Intuere namque mihi illius uultum nunc irati, nunc iterum tristic, paulo post rursum gaudentis et iterum turbati et rursum lenis, in alio tempore de rebus diuinis et uitae aeternae actibus consulentis, paulo post uero, uel quae ad auaritiam uel quae ad gloriam saeculi pertinent, molientis. Vides, quomodo ille, qui putatur unus esse, non est unus, sed tot in eo personae uidentur esse, quot mores, quia et secundum scripturas “insipiens sicut luna mutatur. (My translation)

another time. This might seem trivial, until we turn to more serious cases. At one time I could be striving for divine things and yet at another time I could be moved towards worldly things. Here, we can see that what is problematic for Origen is not so much change *per se*, but changes that could subject one from one state to its contrary state. As a result of such changes, the sinner can never remain *one* – in the sense of perfect constancy of character. The language Origen uses here is striking: in the sinner who seems to be one, according to the literal sense, there seem to be many persons due to the lack of constancy, *self-sameness*, in his character. This analysis, I suggest, reveals the heart of what Origen means by the ethical sense of multiplicity.

To sum up, Origen argues that one person is truly *many* if he possesses internal division of opinions and feelings which stand in opposition to one another. Internal division therefore is the ruling characteristic that qualifies a person to be associated with multiplicity in its true – ethical – sense. Paradoxically, internal division turns the literally one into what is truly many. This is in contrast with the *vir unus* – the perfect man – who is not subjected to changes that bring about in him one state at one time and its contrary at another time. Thus the meaning of oneness in its ethical sense is characterised by the perfect constancy of character, a kind of *self-sameness*. This unity has the complementary effect of transforming the literally many into one man, as is found in Acts 4.32 where the multitude of believers are described as having ‘one heart and one soul’. For although there are many of them in the literal sense, yet there is a perfect constancy of character amongst the many believers. This is why in the true church, many righteous men are the *vir unus* – the perfect man who shall receive the prize from God.

#### *One God – the self-same, unchanging reality*

Up to this point, we have seen how Origen utilises the distinction between one and many to distinguish between ethically perfect and imperfect reality. And we have clarified that the ethical sense of one and many is closely related to the notion of self-sameness and internal division respectively. But ultimately, what grounds the ethical interpretation of the one and many as an appropriate device to differentiate between good and evil? According to Origen, the ethical sense of oneness (and its contrary) is most absolutely found in the character of God himself. The *vir unus* is an appropriate phrase to praise the perfect righteous man because he is the true imitator of God. Thus we have now come to the summit of Origen’s ethical interpretation of the one and many: the character of God himself as truly one, self-same and without divisions.

I have argued throughout this section that for Origen, the ethical sense of many is not an absolute rejection of multiplicity or plurality. Rather, multitude in the ethical sense refers to

subjection to diverse conflicting states – thoughts, feelings, behaviours, etc. Verbal multiplicity is imperfect because it lacks internal unity. Consequently, one word could stand in mutual opposition to another. The sinner is many because he is internally divided, acting in contrary ways. So a reality described as many in the ethical sense is imperfect because it does not possess an ultimate bond of unity which holds together the multiplicity and prevents the possibility of internal conflict caused by diverse contrary states. According to Origen, this state of affairs stands in sharp contrast with the character of God as indicated in Deut 6.4 (‘Hear O Israel! The Lord your God; God is one’). In *Homilies on 1 Samuel* I.4, Origen argues that the sense of oneness indicated in this verse clearly goes beyond what we have been calling its literal sense. God is called one not simply according to number: ‘God is to be believed to be above all number.’ Rather, ‘one’ indicates God’s self-sameness or immutability in his character. In Ps 101.28 (LXX), God is said to be ‘always the same’. Further, God said of himself in Mal 3.6: ‘I do not change.’ Cross-referencing these verses, Origen argues that the ‘one’ in Deut 6.4 should also be read in this sense. God’s character stands in contrast to the ‘many’ in that he is never subjected to the possibility of acting in contrary ways. Rather, God is truly one because he is ever self-same without being other than who he is. As a result, ‘that which does not change is said to be one.’

It is now possible to see how God’s oneness, interpreted as self-sameness of his character, forms the basis for Origen’s ethical interpretation of the one and many. On the one hand, the righteous man is called one because he is the ‘true imitator of God’.<sup>136</sup> In other words, the righteous man truly reflects the divine in that he does not act in contrary ways and is subjected to internal division. In the case of the church, the disciples of Christ are called one on the basis of the same reasoning. Since the literally many have acted in unity and harmony, they were described as possessing one heart and one mind as though one because they truly reflect the nature of God’s self-sameness. Likewise, the Word of God is one in that its diverse aspects or parts are characterised by the unity-without-division amongst them. On the contrary, evil and imperfect realities are called ‘many’ in order to reflect how their characters are contrary to God. Everything that is called ‘many’ – a single sinner, many words, etc. – lacks self-sameness due to the presence of internal divisions. Thus as we can see, Origen’s ethical interpretation of the one and many ultimately springs from his desire to put God self-same character as the measure of all things. The nature of things can be one or many in the literal sense but the ultimate measure of their nature comes from the one and many in the ethical sense, supplied by the perfection of God himself. Since God himself is self-same, what is perfect should also be measured by this ethical

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<sup>136</sup> *Hom1S* I.4.

sense of oneness. Likewise, since God himself is free from internal divisions, what is imperfect is measured by this ethical sense of multiplicity. In the *Homilies on Leviticus*, Origen remarks that ‘he who is holy is of God alone...but he who is a sinner and unclean is of the many.’<sup>137</sup> It is possible to generalise this statement as a summary of Origen’s ethical understanding of the one and many: whatever is holy is of God alone, but whatever is imperfect is of the many.

What I have uncovered in this section is a much neglected dimension of Origen’s reflections on divine simplicity. Divine unity and immutability have been recognised by scholars as central for the patristic doctrine of divine simplicity.<sup>138</sup> However, it is less often observed that these themes are also used in an *ethical* setting – in the context of discussing the perfect constancy of God’s character. Karl Barth’s supposedly revisionary account of divine simplicity is actually not so new because as we have seen, something similar is already found in Origen.<sup>139</sup> Origen consistently draws on oneness and unchangeability to describe the perfect self-sameness – or faithfulness – of God’s character. What makes Origen’s account different from Barth’s is that whereas the latter saw the ethical sense of simplicity as opposing to the metaphysical sense, this opposition is replaced by a synthesis in the former. We have already seen a sign of the synthesis in Origen. The same scriptural passage – Mal 3.6 – is used by Origen to justify both the metaphysical simplicity of the divine nature and the ethical simplicity of the divine character.<sup>140</sup> For Origen, these verses indicate that God is one and unchangeable both in the metaphysical sense (he is a simple intellectual existence) and in the ethical sense (he never acts in ways contrary to himself). I suggest that this synthesis is possible in Origen because for him, there is a profound connection between metaphysical change and ethical change.

### THE METAPHYSICAL-ETHICAL SYNTHESIS

We have now reached the climax of this chapter: the *synthesis* between the ethical and the metaphysical sense of divine simplicity. On the one hand, we have seen that for Origen, God is a simple intellectual existence. The distinction between simple incorporeal existence and composite corporeal existences serves as a measure of perfection and imperfection. This distinction serves to distinguish God, as the perfectly self-same nature, from corruptible natures. On the other hand, Origen also utilises the ethical sense of one and many as a measure of perfection and imperfection. The ethical sense of oneness truly reflects God’s perfectly self-same character,

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<sup>137</sup> *HomLx* V.12.9.

<sup>138</sup> On this point, see the insightful analysis of Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 2, *Basic Questions in Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1971), 119–83.

<sup>139</sup> Barth understood simplicity as the “trustworthiness” of God. Barth, *CD II/1*, 458–9.

<sup>140</sup> *CCels* IV.14 (metaphysical); *Hom1S* I.4 (ethical).

albeit in the ethical sense that he does not act in contradictory ways. As I have suggested at the beginning of this chapter, Origen's understanding of self-sameness ultimately results in a synthesis. I shall now turn to show that Origen indeed explicitly connects the two.

For Origen, the God who is one in his character is also the God who is the simple in his nature. However, Origen rarely spells out systematically the connection between the Good and the Simple Mind in a detailed manner. But a crucial connection between the two notions is found in a passage in Origen's devotional treatise *Peri Euchēs*. In *PEuch.* XXI.2, Origen is discussing Jesus' preface to the disciples in Matt 6.7 before he teaches them the Lord's Prayer. According to Jesus, the disciples are not to be like the gentile who 'uses vain repetitions'. What does Jesus mean by 'vain repetitions'? As we should expect by now, Origen's interpretation of this phrase draws on the ethical sense of the one and many. But this time, he provides a connection that is not mentioned in all our previous examples:

It seems indeed that he who speaks much "uses vain repetitions," and he who "uses vain repetitions" speaks much. *For no material or bodily thing is single: but every one of them, though reckoned single, is split up and cut in pieces and divided into several parts, having lost its unity.* Virtue is one, vice is many; truth is one, falsehood is many; the true righteousness is one, ways to counterfeiting it are many; the wisdom of God is one, the wisdoms "of this world," and "of the rulers of this world, which are coming to nought," are many; the word of God is one, those who are estranged from God are many.<sup>141</sup>

καὶ ἔοικέ γε ὁ πολυλογῶν βαττολογεῖν, καὶ ὁ βαττολογῶν πολυλογεῖν. οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐν τῆς ὕλης καὶ τῶν σωμάτων, ἀλλ' ἕκαστον τῶν νομιζομένων ἐν ἑσχίσται καὶ διακείμεται καὶ διήρηται εἰς πλείονα τὴν ἑνωσιν ἀπολωλεκός. ἐν γὰρ τὸ ἀγαθὸν πολλὰ δὲ τὰ αἰσχροῦ, καὶ ἐν ἡ ἀλήθεια πολλὰ δὲ τὰ ψευδῆ, καὶ ἐν ἡ ἀληθείας δικαιοσύνη, πολλὰ δὲ ἕξεις ταύτην ὑποκρίνονται, καὶ ἐν ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ σοφία, πολλὰ δὲ αἱ καταργούμεναι τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, καὶ εἷς μὲν ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος, πολλοὶ δὲ οἱ ἄλλότριοι τοῦ θεοῦ.

Origen's interpretation of 'vain repetitions' in Mt 6.7 is similar to how he interprets the sense of 'multitude of words' in Prov 10.19, as we have seen previously. The multitude in question is not merely to be taken in the literal sense, but in the ethical sense where it indicates the nature of the imperfect and fallen reality in contrast with the perfect virtuous reality. But what is new in this

<sup>141</sup> *PEuch.* XXI.2 (italics mine).

passage is found in the second sentence, where Origen implicitly associates what is truly many in the ethical sense with what is *material*. According to this passage, what is truly many in the ethical sense reflects the nature of material reality. Although Origen does not elaborate in detail why there is such a correspondence, it is not difficult to infer from the passage what he might have in mind. We have seen that for something to be many in the ethical sense means that it is subjected to internal division. The man who is joyful at one time, and sad at another time, is aptly called many in the ethical sense because his nature is divided, opened to being in contrary states. This state of affairs resembles the nature of material reality which according to Origen is subjected to being 'split up', 'cut in pieces' and 'divided into parts'. In other words, Origen highlights an analogy between those who are ethically many on the one hand, and corporeal realities on the other: the sense in which the many lacks self-sameness in their characters mirrors the sense in which bodies are subjected to dissolutions. This analogy points to the fact that divisions and schisms which are characteristic of the many in the ethical sense find a natural counterpart in material divisions and dissolutions. Once the analogy is established, it is easy to see why it makes sense to associate the ethically many with material reality: both possess the crucial feature of imperfection, namely, internal division without unity.

We can attempt to put the point positively. In this passage, Origen sees an analogy between the one and many in their ethical and metaphysical sense. On the one hand, the ethically many is multiple because it lacks an ultimate bond of unity. God is perfectly one because his actions are characterised by an ultimate unity: he is self-same in all his acts and he would never act in ways contrary to his nature. Similarly, the church and the *vir unus* are one because both of their actions are characterised by an ultimate unity. On the other hand, what is corporeal is multiple because it is constituted of many parts. Bodies lack an ultimate bond of unity because there is nothing that prevents their eventual dissolution back into multiple individual parts. God, however, is perfectly one and simple. He is not composed of multiple parts that would bring internal division in his being. God is indivisible and so he possesses an ultimate unity that is absent in corporeal realities. Thus what holds the analogy between the ethical and metaphysical in Origen's synthesis is the notion of *self-sameness*: that which remains ever the same is one, and that which results in division and dissolution is many. At the level of self-sameness, we have a synthesis between the notion of the perfectly Good (one in the ethical sense) and the perfectly incorporeal (one in the metaphysical sense). This is why for Origen, Mal 3.6 refer to both the simplicity of God's character and the simplicity of his nature.

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that a metaphysical-ethical synthesis lies at the centre of Origen's concept of divine simplicity. For Origen, God is perfectly self-same. This self-sameness can be expressed both ethically and metaphysically. I have stressed that we must interpret the meaning of unity and simplicity carefully. According to Origen, unity and simplicity do not rule out multiplicity *absolutely*. Whenever Origen considers multiplicity and composition, he had a specific type of plurality in mind. What is in question is not the literal plurality of objects or distinctions. Rather, Origen is concerned with multiplicity and composition that would compromise God's self-same perfection. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise that when Origen considers divine simplicity, he is working with a sense of multiplicity that could not in principle be united by a higher unity.

The conceptual implication of this analysis is that divine simplicity is best understood within the larger notion of God's self-sameness. If I am correct that there is a synthesis between the ethical and the metaphysical in Origen, then God's simplicity cannot be understood apart from the wider notion of self-sameness wherein we find the synthesis. This connection in Origen's thought is hitherto little explored and yet in my view constitutes the key element that knits together his account of divine simplicity. By reading Origen's understanding as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis, we interpret God's simplicity as not solely referring to his metaphysical lack of composition and incorruptibility, expressing his metaphysical supremacy over creatures, but also his perfect goodness, expressing his ethical supremacy over creatures. For Origen, the ethical supremacy of God is closely connected with the metaphysical: what is simple metaphysically is also what is one ethically, and conversely what is composite metaphysically is also what is many ethically. If we focus only on the metaphysical aspect of Origen's doctrine of divine simplicity, we will miss the connection between the metaphysical and the ethical aspects.

We can now conclude the first part of this study by returning to the *status quaestionis* in ante-Nicene theology concerning the meaning of divine simplicity. As we have seen in the last chapter, divine simplicity emerged as a purely metaphysical doctrine in the apologists. It is the language of non-composition found in Plato's *Phaedo* that dominates early ante-Nicene expression. For God to be simple means that he is without parts or composition. God must be simple because it is unworthy of God to conceive his nature as composed of parts that will lead to dissolution. But as we have seen in this chapter, ante-Nicene theologians are also capable of expressing the richness of divine simplicity as found in Plato's *Republic*. For Origen, the metaphysical language of non-composition indeed plays a part in his doctrine of divine simplicity. But ultimately, for Origen, divine simplicity expresses the constancy of God's character as much as the incorruptibility of God's nature. God must be simple because this is the only conception



that is worthy of him. Thus Origen provides a clear example of an ante-Nicene theologian who conceives divine simplicity along the trajectory of the *Republic*: not as a purely metaphysical doctrine, but as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis.

As scholars have recognised, early Christian theology has different conceptions of divine simplicity available. In these two chapters, I have argued that there are two major trajectories of interpretation available in the ante-Nicene period: (a) as a purely metaphysical doctrine based on non-composition, (b) as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis on the basis of self-sameness. What we have seen in the apologists has already hinted at why the first is more common than the second in the ante-Nicene period. When divine simplicity is primarily used as a ‘pattern for theology’ in theological discourse, the language of non-composition is often more helpful for argumentative purposes. When we turn to the emergence of divine simplicity in ante-Nicene Trinitarian discourse, this point will become more apparent still. The ethical sense of simplicity does not appear explicitly within the Trinitarian context, even in Origen. Given that most ante-Nicene writers draw on divine simplicity to provide a ‘pattern for theology’, it is clear why simplicity appears primarily in this period as a purely metaphysical doctrine of non-composition. But this point notwithstanding, what we have seen in Origen suggests that a richer meaning for divine simplicity remains a possibility in ante-Nicene theology. Due to the scarcity of detailed expositions, it is difficult to say whether Origen’s approach is representative in the ante-Nicene period. But for the very least, when we turn to examine the function of divine simplicity in Origen’s Trinitarian theology in the second part of this study, it is important to keep in mind the following conclusion: when the metaphysical language of simplicity (e.g. non-composition) is used, the ethical sense is never far away in Origen’s mind. With this point firmly established, we can now turn to the second part of our study.

## Part II:

### Divine Simplicity in Trinitarian Discourse

## INTERLUDE

If God is simple, what is the consequence for Trinitarian theology? When we turn to the question in the ante-Nicene period, we need to formulate the question more precisely. In the ante-Nicene period, the issue in which divine simplicity played a part, and which became important in later 'Trinitarian theologies', concerns primarily the nature of the Father-Son relation. As a result, the term 'Trinitarian theology' could be misleading. In the ante-Nicene period, we do find reflections on the Holy Spirit but divine simplicity became important only with regard to the nature of the Father-Son relation. Therefore, the question for part II of this study is as follows if God is simple, what is the consequence for the Father-Son relation?

Divine Simplicity's interaction with ante-Nicene reflections on the Father-Son relation must be situated within two important doctrinal-polemical contexts in this period: Valentinian emission (*probolē*) and Monarchianism. On the one hand, the Valentinian notion of *probolē* potentially leads to the Son's generation being conceived as a materialistic process. Such a process threatens to introduce divisions in God. Valentinian *probolē* invites theologians to emphasise the way unity is preserved in the begetting of the Son. On the other hand, Monarchianism identifies the Father and the Son as one and the same. This position poses the diametrically opposite threat to Valentinian *probolē*: the dissolution of the distinction between the Father and Son. Consequently, Monarchianism invites theologians to articulate a strong sense of the Son's distinction from the Father. A thorough consideration of the connection between divine simplicity and these contexts has not been carried out in scholarship. I suggest that without situating the function of divine simplicity in these doctrinal-polemical contexts, we end up with a thin philosophical analysis. This is especially crucial when we turn to Origen because many key features of his Trinitarian theology have direct points of contact with these two important polemical contexts. As I shall argue, Origen utilises divine simplicity as a polemical strategy in both of these contexts. Thus my overall approach in the second part of this study is summarised as the attempt to establish a closer connection between Origen's Trinitarian theology and the third century doctrinal-polemical landscape. This approach, I suggest, is the best way to shed light on the function of divine simplicity in ante-Nicene Trinitarian discourse.

Chapters 3 and 4 will first specify the complex interaction between divine simplicity and theological reflections on the Father-Son relation in the ante-Nicene period. Chapter 3 illustrates the function divine simplicity acquired in anti-Valentinian polemics by taking a brief look at Irenaeus' arguments against Valentinian *probolē*. Chapter 4 then turns to reconfigure a much misunderstood relationship that in modern scholarship, namely, between divine simplicity and

Monarchianism. These two chapters serve as the background for our detailed examination of divine simplicity in Origen's Trinitarian theology. With this background in place, Chapters 5 and 6 examine the function of divine simplicity in Origen's account of the Father-Son relation. Chapter 5 investigates whether divine simplicity has a specific role in Origen's anti-Monarchian emphasis on the distinction between the Father and Son. Finally, Chapter 6 turns to examine whether divine simplicity continues to function as an anti-Valentinian emphasis in Origen's account of the Son's generation, and if so, how Origen is able to hold this anti-Valentinian emphasis alongside his anti-Monarchian emphasis.

## CHAPTER 3

### ‘God is All Mind’ (*Haer.* II.13.8)

#### Irenaeus’ Critique of Valentinian *probolē* and the Proto-Trinitarian Problematic

God is all sight and all hearing – for he sees in the same way that he hears, and he hears in the same way that he sees –...God is all Mind and all Word, and that as far as he is Mind, he is also Word, and that his Word is this Mind.’

(Irenaeus, *Haer.* II.13.8)

If God is simple, what then for Trinitarian theology? In this chapter, we examine a key episode integral to the formation of the ante-Nicene problematic. Irenaeus is often presented as one of the first Christian theologians who held the ‘identity thesis’ as an implication of divine simplicity.<sup>142</sup> This is the claim that if God is simple, then his attributes are identical to each other and further, identical to God himself. This presentation of Irenaeus is justified by the language found in Book 2 of *Adversus Haereses*. However, this approach misses the fact that Irenaeus’ language forms part of an argument against a technical theological idea in the second century: the Valentinian emission (Latin: *prolatio*/Greek: *προβολή*). The Valentinians were engaged in speculative protology, a task common in the Neo-Pythagorean philosophy of the time.<sup>143</sup> They sought to provide an account of the origin of multiplicity and diversity in creation from a single first principle. The Valentinian account is characterised by a speculative drama based on the notion of *probolē*. According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians proposed that creation was made through orderly emissions of many entities called Aeons serving as intermediaries between God and creation. These Aeons were emitted in a spiritual realm called Pleroma. The Valentinians imagined a mythological account of the emissions of multiple Aeons in the Pleroma in order to

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<sup>142</sup> Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 108, 131–2.; Stead, *Divine Substance*, 109, 163–4, 187–9.

<sup>143</sup> The most detailed account of Valentinianism to date is Einar Thomassen’s comprehensive study. See Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the “Valentinians”* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008). Following Kalvesmaki, I find the term ‘protology’ helpful as it indicates that Valentinian theories sought to account for everything beginning from a *πρῶτος*. See Joel Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic: Number Symbolism in Platonism and Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4.

present creation as the result of a drama in the spiritual realm. In response to the Valentinian myth, Irenaeus developed a critique of Valentinian emissions based on divine simplicity. Irenaeus argues that given divine simplicity, the whole account of Valentinian protology collapses. Irenaeus' affirmation of divine simplicity is thus an integral part of his wider critique of Valentinian *probolē*.

In this chapter, I suggest that the anti-Valentinian polemical context illuminates the Trinitarian significance of Irenaeus' affirmation of divine simplicity. This is because Irenaeus' critique of Valentinian *probolē* actually opens up a path for divine simplicity to enter Trinitarian discourse through the question of the procession of the divine Word.<sup>144</sup> In developing a critique of Valentinian *probolē*, Irenaeus provides for the first time a clear articulation of a theological point central in later Trinitarian theologies: divine simplicity implies that the generation of Word is not like human generation.<sup>145</sup> This point is completely missed by standard engagements with Irenaeus' affirmation of divine simplicity because the anti-Valentinian context is ignored. In this chapter, I highlight Irenaeus' use of divine simplicity as an anti-Valentinian polemical strategy in order to analyse how he develops the theological point concerning the nature of generation appropriate to God. My thesis is that in constructing an anti-Valentinian polemic against *probolē*, Irenaeus actually develops a 'proto-Trinitarian' analysis of the nature of generation that relies on divine simplicity, thus enabling the doctrine to gain a significant role in ante-Nicene Trinitarian reflections.

## VALENTINIAN PROTOLOGY

Valentinian<sup>146</sup> protology refers not to a single system, but rather to multiple systems that attempt to provide a mythological account of creation based on number symbolism. Even within

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<sup>144</sup> To my knowledge, this point has escaped the attention of scholars. In modern scholarship, it is commonly assumed that divine simplicity poses a potential problem for upholding the proper distinction between the Father and the Son. The 'logical problem' highlighted in the introduction remains the common view concerning the relationship between divine simplicity and Trinitarian theology. Recent scholarship has shown that divine simplicity was involved in patristic accounts of theological epistemology – accounts of how we come to know God and the nature of that knowledge. Radde-Gallwitz, *Basil of Caesarea*. But as far as I know, no one has noted that divine simplicity first entered Trinitarian discourse through the question of the procession of the divine Word.

<sup>145</sup> See note 410 for references.

<sup>146</sup> A note is necessary regarding the term 'Valentinian'. This term refers to what Irenaeus conceived to be followers of Valentinus, a second-century Christian teacher whose teachings may not agree with his followers. The discrepancy between the Valentinians and Valentinus himself on doctrine is well established in modern scholarship. See Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*. In *Adversus Haereses* Book 1, Irenaeus himself recognises that there are variations amongst the teachings of the 'Valentinians'. For the

*Adversus Haereses*, where we find one of the few extant reports of Valentinian protologies, Irenaeus presents a number of variations of them that juxtapose similar themes and ideas. Thus strictly speaking, we should speak of Valentinian *protologies* in the plural. Given that our purpose here is to examine Irenaeus' critique of Valentinian *probole* based on divine simplicity, we only need to consider one particular presentation of the Valentinian system. In the opening chapters in *Adversus Haereses* Book 1, the so-called 'grand notice'<sup>147</sup>, Irenaeus presents the details of the Valentinian myth which he criticises in Book 2 on the basis of divine simplicity.<sup>148</sup> For our purposes, we shall restrict our attention to the 'grand notice' and the necessary details criticised by Irenaeus in Book 2.

According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians propose that in the beginning was the perfect God called First-Beginning, First-Father, or Profundity. This perfect God is invisible and incomprehensible, eternal and ingenerate. The First-Father exists in quiet throughout the ages along with Thought, which is also named Grace and Silence. Everything came forth from Profundity, who decided to emit from him a seed which would be the beginning of all things. The method for this emission, characteristic of the rest of the Valentinian account, is expressed using human sexual imagery. Profundity deposited the beginning of all things as a seed in the womb of Silence who co-exists with him. Thus the beginning of all things came from the conjugal union of the first couple, First-Father and Silence.<sup>149</sup>

Valentinian protology is divided into three stages. The first two stages account for the emission within the spiritual realm, the Pleroma (Fullness). The third stage accounts for the

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purpose of our study, Valentinianism remains a good umbrella term because it reflects how certain doctrines – especially the emission of the Aeons from God the Father – were associated by subsequent Christian theologians with the followers of Valentinus. So in what follows, I shall speak of the 'Valentinians' not as a term referring to the genuine teachings of the Valentinians. Rather, I use the term to capture the perspective of the authors examined in this study (e.g. Irenaeus, Tertullian and Origen) who considered the teaching of emission (*prolatio/probole*) to be 'Valentinian'. As Thomassen has remarked, it is important to remember that this is a 'heresiological' term, as the 'Valentinians would never have referred to themselves by the term. See Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*, 4–5.

<sup>147</sup> Scholars on Gnosticism debate about whether the 'grand notice' provides a general summary of various Valentinian systems, or whether it refers to a specific variant.

<sup>148</sup> *Haer.* II.13 and II.17.

<sup>149</sup> *Haer.* I.1. It is worth noting that there are internal debates amongst Valentinians on whether at the head of the emission of Aeons is a monad or a dyad. Moreover, it is debated also whether the First-Father is gendered or not. See Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic*, 52–60. Once again, I present the dyadic version because it is the one that is criticised by Irenaeus in *Haer.* II.13 and II.17.

emission of everything outside the Pleroma, namely, non-spiritual realities.<sup>150</sup> In the first stage, we have the formation of the remaining six Aeons alongside First-Father and Silence in the Primary Ogdoad: Mind, Truth, Word, Life, Man, and Church. The Primary Ogdoad is divided into the Tetrad regarded by the Valentinians as the root of all things.<sup>151</sup> This Tetrad consists of First-Father, Thought, Mind and Truth. In this Tetrad, Mind (also called Only-Begotten, Father and Beginning of all things) and Truth were generated as a result of the impregnation of Thought by the seed of Profundity. Subsequently, the second couple – Mind and Truth – combined to emit Word and Life. Word and Life in turn combined to emit Man and Church. So apart from Profundity and Thought, the remaining Aeons in the Primary Ogdoad are generated as a result of conjugal union where one pair of Aeons emits another pair.

From the first Ogdoad, we then have a second stage of emissions of other Aeons based on the conjugal unions between the second Tetrad: Word, Life, Man and Church. Wishing to glorify the First-Father, Word and Life together emitted ten other Aeons whereas Man and Church together emitted twelve Aeons. Together with the Primary Ogdoad, all the emissions form the thirty Aeons central to the Valentinian notion of spiritual reality, the Pleroma.

In the third stage, Valentinian protology provides an account of the Fall which leads to the creation of the rest of reality outside the Pleroma. According to the Valentinians, only Mind, the third Aeon in the Primary Ogdoad, knows the First-Father. The First-Father is otherwise incomprehensible to all the other Aeons because Thought wished the other Aeons to have the desire to seek after the First-Father. As a result, the other Aeons grew in their desire to know and see the First-Father. Beginning from Mind and Truth, the passion to know the incomprehensible Father spreads across all the Aeons until it reached the last and youngest of all Aeons, namely, Wisdom. Due to the passion, the material-soulful universe was created outside of the Plerome. For our purposes here, we only need to note that it is due to the passion of Wisdom that gives rise to everything that exists besides the Pleroma. Valentinian protology thus accounts for the generation of non-spiritual reality from spiritual reality through the passion arising within the latter.

In these three stages, we now have a sufficient outline of Valentinian protology to understand Irenaeus' critique. The key aspects criticised by Irenaeus' on the basis of divine simplicity are (1) the creation of the Primary Ogdoad, (2) the subsequent emission of the Aeons

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<sup>150</sup> This account is based on Irenaeus' report in *Haer.* I.1-2, 4-5. For a more detailed analysis drawing on all available sources, see Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*; Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic*.

<sup>151</sup> For the Pythagorean background, see Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic*, 50–51.



from the Primary Ogdoad, (3) the possibility of passion and ignorance arising in the Pleroma. For the sake of clarity, I have included Joel Kalvesmaki's helpful representation<sup>152</sup> of the Valentinian system summarised in Irenaeus' 'grand notice':

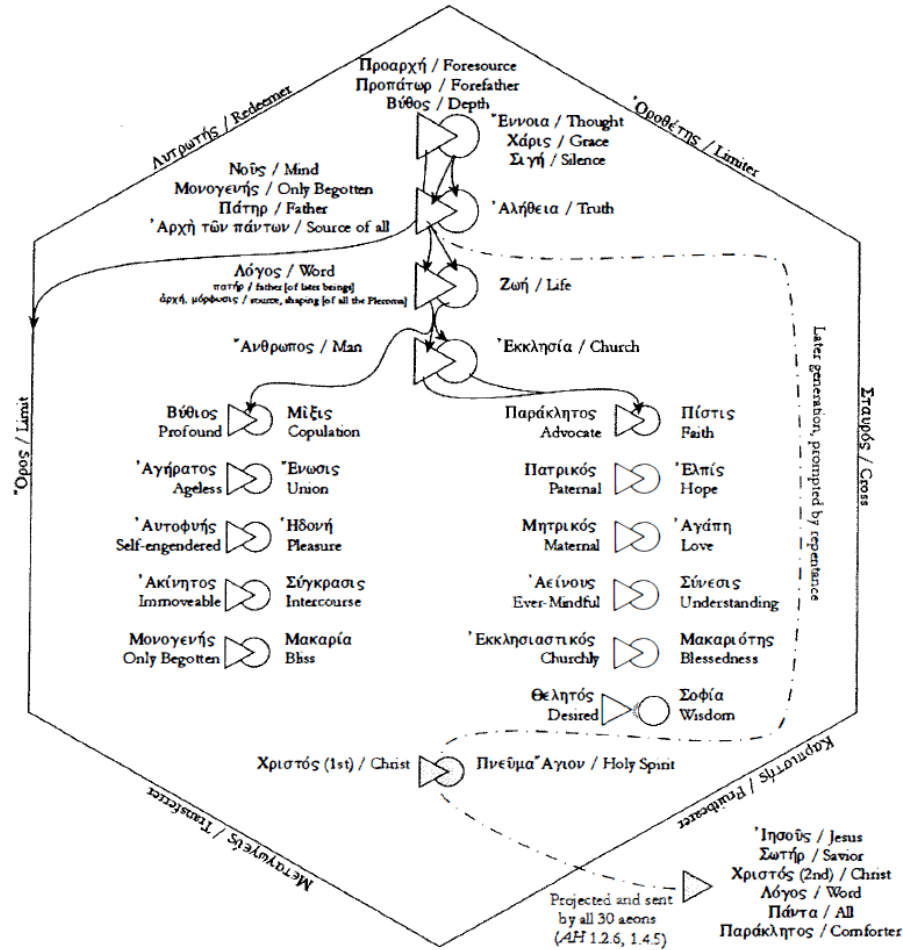


Figure 1. The Valentinian Pleroma, according to Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1.1-9. Male aeons are assigned (arbitrarily) triangles; females, circles. Hollow triangles and circles represent the original 30 aeons. Arrows indicate lines of projection. The large hexagon represents Limit, who is assigned six names and is said to be hexagonal (ill. by author)

## DIVINE SIMPLICITY AND TWO PRINCIPLES IN IRENAEUS' ANTI-VALENTINIAN GRAMMAR OF GENERATION

As we have seen, Valentinian protology rests crucially on the idea of emission (*probolē*). Emissions account for the process that mediates between God and creation. In two chapters in Book 2 of *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus composes a detailed critique of the Valentinian emissions based on divine simplicity. In what follows, I shall demonstrate that in criticising the Valentinian

<sup>152</sup> Joel Kalvesmaki, "Formation of the Early Christian Theology of Arithmetic Number Symbolism in the Late Second and Early Third Century" (Catholic University of America, 2006), 17; A similar figure is reproduced in the published version of the thesis. See Kalvesmaki, *The Theology of Arithmetic*, 39.

emissions, Irenaeus develops two sets of principles which must be satisfied by any accounts of generation involving the simple God as the generator. The first concerns the *manner* of generation appropriate for the simple God. The second concerns the *implication* that follows from the kind of generation appropriate to the simple God. I call these *principles of unity* because as we shall see, both stress the unity between the generator (the simple God) and the generated required by God's simplicity. Based on these two principles, Irenaeus criticises the Valentinian emissions as creating theologically inappropriate divisions between God and what is generated by him, thus leading to a materialistic and anthropomorphic notion of God.

Before turning to Irenaeus, I shall offer a brief caveat: Irenaeus' principles do not specifically address the generation of the Son. For Irenaeus, the question of the Son's generation is an incomprehensible mystery.<sup>153</sup> Irenaeus developed the principles of unity for the specific task of criticising the Valentinian emissions of Aeons. A degree of overlap no doubt exists between the two problems because Valentinian emissions involve key Christological titles (Word, only-begotten, truth, wisdom, etc.). So Irenaeus' principles inevitably will become relevant for theological reflections on the generation of the Son, as we shall see in Origen. But the caveat is important because as I shall highlight at the end of this chapter, Irenaeus' principles in *Haer.* II.13 and II.17 are inadequate if we apply them directly to the generation of the Son. This is why my claim is that Irenaeus' anti-Valentinian polemic lays down the shape of a *proto*-Trinitarian problem, namely, the implications of divine simplicity for the general question regarding the kind of generation appropriate for God. The fully Trinitarian problematic regarding divine simplicity's implications for the specific question of the Son's generation would require further consideration beyond Irenaeus' principles, as we will see.

Let us turn to Irenaeus. The general shape of his argument in *Haer.* II.13 and II.17 is the same.<sup>154</sup> According to Irenaeus, there are two ways to interpret the nature of emission (*probole*). Either the Aeons are generated in a manner appropriate to a simple God, or they are generated in a way that violates divine simplicity. In *Haer.* II.17.2, Irenaeus presents the two interpretations in technical terms:

So, we ask this question: How were the other Aeons emitted? Did they (1) remain united to the one who emitted them, as the rays to the sun; or were they (2) [emitted]

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<sup>153</sup> *Haer.* II.28.2-3.

<sup>154</sup> In II.13, Irenaeus argues against the first stage of Valentinian protology, namely, the emission of the Aeons in the Primary Ogdoad. In II.17, he then turns to argue against the second stage, namely, the emissions of the rest of the Aeons in the Pleroma. His argument in both chapters, however, retains the same shape.

as a distinct and separated work, so that each of them would exist separately and have its own form, just as human beings have their source from human beings, and cattle have their source from cattle? Or was it by sprouting, like branches from a tree? And were they (1) of the same substance as those from whom they were emitted, or did they (2) have substance from some other substance? And were they emitted (1) at the same time so that they would be contemporary to some order, [or] that (2) some would be older and others younger? And were they (1) simple and of one form, and in every way equal and similar, just as air and light are emitted; or were they (2) composite and of different form, dissimilar to their fellow members?

Quaeretur igitur, quemadmodum emissi sunt reliqui Aeones? (1) Vtrum uniti ei qui emisit, quemadmodum a sole radii, an (2) efficaciter et partiliter, uti sit unusquisque eorum separatim et suam figurationem habens, quemadmodum ab homine homo et a pecude pecus, aut secundum germinationem, quemadmodum ab arbore rami? Et (1) utrum eiusdem substantiae exsistebant his qui se emiserunt, an (2) ex altera quadam substantia substantiam habentes? Et (1) utrum in eodem emissi sunt, ut eiusdem temporis essent sibi, an (2) secundum ordinem quendam, ita ut antiquiores quidam ipsorum, alii uero iuueniores essent? Et (1) utrum simplices quidam et uniformes et undique sibi aequales et similes, quemadmodum spiritus et lumina emissa sunt, an (2) compositi et differentes, dissimiles membris suis?

This passage presents four pairs of contrasting accounts of emission, with *secundum germinationem*, *quemadmodum ab arbore rami* being the odd one out. Irenaeus does not really set out an argument when he turns to this language, except to carry forward his conclusions based on his first metaphor, ‘rays from the sun’. We shall turn to highlight this point in due course. This oddity notwithstanding, the following structure is apparent in the above passage: all the options labelled by (1) are characterised by *unity* between the generator and the generated whereas all the options labelled by (2) are characterised by *discontinuity* between the two. From the last pair of contrasts, we can infer that the first options are what would be characteristic of simplicity, and the second of composition. Moreover, a further division is helpful to break down Irenaeus’ passage above. The first pair of contrasts is concerned with the *manner* or mode of generation:

- (i) The generated remains one with the generator v.s. The generated becomes a distinct separate existence from the generator

Whereas the other three pairs are concerned with the respective *implications* that follow each mode of generation set out in (i):

- (ii) The generated is consubstantial with the generator vs. The generated is out of the substance of the generator
- (iii) The generated is coterminous with the generator vs. The generated is from the generator with a temporal ordering
- (iv) The generated and generator are simple, single in form and similar with the generator vs. The generated and generator are composite, different in form and dissimilar

It is clear that the first option in (ii)-(iv) corresponds to the implications of the first mode of emission in (i), whereas the second option in (ii)-(iv) corresponds to the implications of the second mode of emission in (i). This structure helpfully points towards two key questions concerning Valentinian emissions. First, how should we interpret the *manner* of emission in Valentinian protology? Is it compatible with simplicity or not? Second, when we fix the mode of emission, what are the *implications* concerning the relationship between the generator and the generated?

We shall carry out our analysis based on these two questions. But before we do so, an overview of Irenaeus' overall argument is helpful. First, based on a polemical interpretation (e.g. in line with (2) above), he rejects Valentinian emissions as being incompatible with divine simplicity. On Irenaeus' interpretation, Valentinian emissions conceive the Aeons emitted from God (e.g. the First-Father) as separate existences apart from him. This is inappropriate for God because it is grounded on an anthropomorphic notion of generation. Having rejected the Valentinian emission, Irenaeus then attempts to interpret the Valentinian emissions in a way that is compatible with divine simplicity (e.g. in line with (1) above). What if the Aeons are generated such that they retain unity with the generator? According to Irenaeus, if the Valentinians were to take this interpretation of emission, then their whole protology collapses because they will not be able to account for the presence of ignorance and passion in the Pleroma that led to the creation of the material universe. Thus either way, for Irenaeus, the Valentinian system will prove to be untenable. With this overall argument in mind, we can now analyse in detail how divine simplicity functions in Irenaeus' argument.

#### *Principle 1: Inseparability*

According to Irenaeus, the Valentinians compromise divine simplicity because they conceive of the Aeons as existing 'separately and divided' from the First-Father after their emissions.

Irenaeus puts forward two arguments against the possibility of the Aeons generated *effcabiliter et partiliter* from the simple God. His first argument is straightforward:<sup>155</sup> such a mode of emission resembles animal generations, because animal generations represent a typical example of something emitted *effcabiliter et partiliter*. In animal generation, the offspring comes forth from the parent as a separate existence. What Irenaeus means is that there is a non-overlap of spatial location. The animal offspring becomes a distinct existence in the sense that its spatial form of the offspring is clearly marked off from the spatial form of the parent. As a result, animal generation results in the generator being divided into two spatially separated existences. For Irenaeus, the language of something generated *effcabiliter et partiliter* always brings up the kind of emission associated with animal generation. Inevitably, this language implies that both the generator and the generated possess corporeal attributes such as spatial location and size. So if the Aeons were emitted from God as separated existences, as Irenaeus thinks the Valentinian account implies, then God is subjected to an animal-like generation characteristic of corporeal, and not spiritual, substance. Given that corporeal existence is characterised by its composite nature<sup>156</sup>, the language of something emitted *effcabiliter et partiliter* violates divine simplicity.<sup>157</sup>

Irenaeus' second argument is more complex.<sup>158</sup> It is grounded on his analysis of human mental activities.<sup>159</sup> He suggests that the Valentinians might have imagined their emissions –

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<sup>155</sup> *Haer.* II.17.3.

<sup>156</sup> This association is presupposed by Irenaeus throughout Book 2. See *Haer.* II.3.2 (composite = changeable and transitory), II.7.6 (composite = earthly and perishable things vis-à-vis spiritual things), II.13.3 (composite = made up of body and soul), II.13.5 (composite = corporeal), II.17.7 (composite = ensouled, e.g. made up of body and soul).

<sup>157</sup> In setting out this argument, Irenaeus is determined to interpret the Valentinian language of emission uncharitably. As Antonio Orbe has suggested (Antonio Orbe, *Hacia La Primera Teología de La Procesión. Estudios Valentinianos I*, vol. 1, Analecta Gregoriana 99–100 (Roma: U.P. Gregoriana, 1958), 389; Antonio Orbe, *Hacia La Primera Teología de La Procesión. Estudios Valentinianos I*, vol. 2, Analecta Gregoriana 99–100 (Roma: U.P. Gregoriana, 1958), 648–9.), the Valentinians were unlikely to fall into such basic errors, namely, to associate animal-like generation to God. Given the philosophical sophistication of their systems, it is more probable that they would be as keen as Irenaeus to prevent the application of animal-like generations to the divine Pleroma. So we must be careful to take Irenaeus' argument at face value and conclude that the Valentinians themselves understood *prolatio/probolē* in a corporeal sense. However, what is significant to note about Irenaeus' argument is that it provides a standard response to rule out the theological plausibility of Valentinian protology. As we shall see, we see exactly the same kind of anti-Valentinian argument being rehearsed by Origen.

<sup>158</sup> *Haer.* II.13.1–4.

<sup>159</sup> Irenaeus' analysis of emission (*probolē*) based on the analogy of human mind is by no means unique, as shown by Orbe. Orbe, *Hacia I/2*. Moreover, different writers draw on the analysis of the human mind for opposite reasons. Irenaeus' uses the analysis to highlight the discontinuity between the activities of the divine mind from those of the human mind, whereas Justin (*Dial.* 61) and Tertullian (*Aprax.* 5–6) draw on the same analysis to stress instead on the analogy between the two.

specifically the ones within the Primary Ogdoad – in light of human mental activities. In the case of human beings, separate terms such as ‘Thought’, ‘Understanding’, ‘Intention’ and ‘Word’ are markers of different stages of mental activities. These names do not denote something distinct from the mind itself, but ‘particular activities of the mind relating to a determined object and immanent to this mind.’<sup>160</sup> The various stages of intellectual activity eventually form the basis for generating an ‘uttered word’ and as such, they are ‘co-emitters’ of a word. However, ‘Thought’, ‘Understanding’ and the like remain ‘within’ the Mind. Irenaeus’ account of intellectual activity can be summarised as follows<sup>161</sup>:

1. First activity of the Mind: when Mind first fixes itself on an object, its first activity is named ‘Thought’ (*ennoia*)
2. Second stage: when ‘Thought’ develops and takes possession of the soul, it is called ‘Intention’ (*enthymesis*).
3. Third stage: when ‘Intention’ remains fixed on the same object for a long time, and that it grants approval to the object of intellectual activity, then we have ‘Understanding’ (*sensatio*).
4. Fourth stage: when ‘Understanding’ has been maintained for a long time – in other words, when ‘Intention’ has granted approval to a given object for intellectual activity for a long time – then it becomes ‘Counsel’ (*consilium*).
5. Final stage: when the activity of ‘Counsel’ becomes ‘very extensive’, it becomes ‘Thought’ (*cogitatio*). ‘Thought’ as the result of the exercising of intellectual activities for a long period, could be properly called a ‘Word’ (*verbum*), ‘from which the uttered word is emitted’ (*ex quo emissibilis emittitur uerbum*).

According to Irenaeus, in the case of the human mind, ‘Understanding’, ‘Intention’, ‘Thought’ and the like – mental categories – are differentiated due to the progressive development of intellectual activities. The different stages of mental activity acquire different names according to ‘continuance and development’ (*secundum perseverationem et augmentum*) of the mind, and not because of a change (*non secundum immutationem*). The example of the human body undergoing the ageing process illustrates this point. The body constantly undergoes development in time, meaning that it is young at one stage, and then becomes mature at another stage. In other words,

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<sup>160</sup> *Haer.* II.13.1: de aliquo in cogitate dispositae qualeslibet motiones... et in cogitationem coterminatae. We shall see what Irenaeus means by this phrase in the breakdown of the different stages of mental activities.

<sup>161</sup> *Haer.* II.13.2.

while the body at different stages of its aging process is given a different name ('young', 'old'), nonetheless it is the one and the same body that is aging. By aging, our bodies do not become a different substance, but remain the same. Likewise, in the case of the Mind, the various names such as 'Thought', 'Understanding', 'Intention', are simply referring to the same Mind in its various stages of development in its activity. We distinguish between the mental categories not because the mind is changed into something else in each stage of its activity. Rather, we differentiate the different mental categories because the mind's activity possesses different stages of development. While there are different names for the different stages of development in intellectual activities, these names nonetheless refer to realities that remain *within* the Mind and are not separated from it. As a result, a sense of unity remains between the Mind on the one hand, and the various stages of intellectual activities on the other. In Irenaeus' own words, 'all these activities are one and the same thing (*Vnum autem et idem*): they have their origin in the mind and get their names because of development'.<sup>162</sup>

For Irenaeus, this analysis of mental activities reveals two errors in Valentinian *probolē*. First, the Valentinians have misunderstood how the human mind functions. If the emissions in the Primary Ogdoad are indeed imagined according to human mental activities, then the Valentinians have failed to recognise that the differentiation between 'Mind', 'Word' and 'Thought' does not lead to distinction *secundum substantiae demutationem*.<sup>163</sup> Here, Irenaeus is once again reading the Valentinian account uncharitably to suggest that their Aeons are emitted as though there was a separation between the stages of mental activities in a sense appropriate only to animal generation *secundum corporis amissionem*. Rather, if the Valentinians have attended to how the mind functions, then they would discover that the different stages of mental activities are emitted *per radium* and so are 'one and the same' (*Vnum...et idem*).<sup>164</sup> As a result, the Aeons could not be conceived as existing 'separately and divided' from one another. Secondly, and more significantly, the Valentinians have fallen into anthropomorphism. The mind's activity unfolds and develops in different stages of development only because humans are composite, made up of soul and body. In the following passage, Irenaeus explains this point:

You do not understand that in man, who is composite ensouled being ... one might speak of such things, namely, of man's mind and of man's thought, and that from the

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<sup>162</sup> *Haer.* II.13.2: *Vnum autem et idem est omnia quae praedicta sunt, a no initium accipientia et secundum augmentum adsummentia appellationes.*

<sup>163</sup> *Haer.* II.13.4. Irenaeus also accuses the Valentinians of getting the order of mental activities wrong. See *Haer.* II.13.1.

<sup>164</sup> *Haer.* II.13.2.

mind came thought, and from the thought the intention, and from the intention the word. Really, according to the Greeks, the word is the directing power that develops thought; that is something else from the organ by which the word is uttered. So at times man rests and is silent; at times he speaks and acts...The tongue, being fleshy, is not able to keep up with the speed of the human mind, which is spiritual; hence our word is held back within and is not instantaneously uttered as it was conceived by the mind, but piecemeal, as the tongue can minister to it.<sup>165</sup>

In other words, the differentiation *secundum perseuerationem et augmentum* between different activities of the human mind is simply due to the composite nature of human beings. While human mental activities in principle do not suffer delays in their development, the limitations of bodily organs introduce these delays. Accordingly, different stages of development of human mental activity are marked off due to the introduction of these delays. God, however, does not admit such developments because his Mind differs from human minds.<sup>166</sup> It would be absurd to think of God's Mind as embodied because this would lead to the conception of God as composite like humans. So even if we read the Valentinians charitably and interpret their emissions as grounded on generation *secundum perseuerationem et augmentum*, their account still falls into the grave error of anthropomorphism.

As we have seen in the first argument, spatial and corporeal generation straightforwardly violates God's simplicity. A simple God cannot be involved in generation which leads to a generator-generated distinction *secundum substantiae demutationem* or *secundum corporis amissionem*. Irenaeus' second argument adds a further qualification: a simple God also cannot be involved in generation that results in a generator-generated distinction *secundum perseuerationem et augmentum*. This kind of distinction is present only in the case of embodied minds in composite beings. Hence if we apply this kind of mental distinction to God, then his simplicity is once again violated.

Through the two arguments we have now examined, Irenaeus articulates a clear set of principles concerning the manner of generation that is compatible with divine simplicity. We can summarise this as follows:

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<sup>165</sup> *Haer.* II.28.4. See also *Haer.* II.13.3-4.

<sup>166</sup> Irenaeus is not often considered a 'negative' theologian but here we have a clear instance of his negative theology. For Irenaeus, divine transcendence is best preserved by making a clear distinction between God as Mind, and human minds.



### *Irenaeus' first principle of unity*

1. (*Inseparability*) Divine simplicity implies that something cannot be generated *efficabiliter et partiliter* from God. This rules out generations that result in the following distinctions between generator and the generated:
  - a. Animal-like: *secundum corporis amissionem* or *secundum substantiae demutationem*
  - b. Composite human mind-like: *secundum perseuerationem et augmentum*

#### *Principle 2: Generation tanquam a sole radii*

##### A. Principle 2a: Consubstantiality

What, then, is the kind of generation appropriate to a simple God? For Irenaeus, it is best illustrated in terms of three metaphors: rays from the sun (*a sole radii*), lights from a light (*a lumine lumina*), and branches from a tree (*ab arbore rami*). According to Irenaeus, these metaphors illustrate the kind of generation compatible with divine simplicity. They show that the kind of generation compatible with simplicity has two implications for the nature of the generator-generated relation. The first concerns the nature of this relation with respect to substance; the second with respect to time. Irenaeus discusses the three metaphors in *Haer.* II.17.4-7, but his discussion on the two implications of simplicity is based primarily on the metaphor of light alone, set out in *Haer.* II.17.4. So the following analysis will be mainly based on this chapter.

What links the three metaphors together for Irenaeus, seems to be the fact that the generated differs from the generator only by generation (*generatione*) or size (*magnitudine*). No differences of substance exist between the two, because the generated are of the same substance with their generator.<sup>167</sup> For example, we can consider the case of rays from the sun, the latter is emitted from the former.<sup>168</sup> The former serves as the source of the latter, differentiating the rays from the sun by generation (*generatione*). Further, the sun's brightness is much greater than the rays emitted from it, differentiating the rays from the sun by magnitude (*magnitudine*). What remains the same between the two, however, is brightness: both the sun and its rays share the nature of being bright. Hence the rays are 'of one form, in every way equal and similar' (*uniformes et undique sibi aequales et similes*) with the sun. In this way, the sun and its emitted rays are *consubstantial*. The example of rays from the sun offers as an appropriate illustration of generation

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<sup>167</sup> *Haer.* II.17.4: eiusdem...substantiae cum sint cum principe emissionis ipsorum.

<sup>168</sup> Irenaeus never analyses the metaphor of rays from the sun in relation to consubstantiality. Instead, he discusses this metaphor in relation to the necessity of a receptacle in emission (*Haer.* II.13.5). But this detail is a plausible reconstruction of Irenaeus' reasoning that is clear from this chapter.

by a simple generator because the sun resembles a simple reality. On the one hand, the sun does not change due to the emission of the rays. It remains what it is without being diminished in its own brightness. On the other hand, the sun does not emit that which is contrary to its own nature, namely, darkness. So he is not composed of contrary parts in opposition. If we combine these two senses, it is clear that the sun remains *self-same* and resembles a simple reality. For Irenaeus, the metaphor of rays from the sun highlights a crucial implication of divine simplicity: if a simple God is a generator, then what he generates can neither be opposite to his nature, nor bring about a change that would diminish his nature. A simple God must generate that which is consubstantial with himself.

Irenaeus probably supposes a similar analysis for understanding the other two metaphors. In the case of branches from a tree, it is difficult to see how this organic metaphor could serve as an analogy for generation involving a simple God. Irenaeus never clarifies this point and in *Haer.* II.17.6. he simply glosses over the details and states that consubstantiality follows from the metaphor. But in the case of lights from a light, Irenaeus offers us a brief analysis. He imagines the exercise of lighting torches from a single source of light. Each time a torch is lit up, a new light is generated. However, these lights could be recombined with the original source anytime because of the unity of nature between the two. The generated light and the source thus share a fundamental sense of unity such that by putting the two together, it will neither cause a change in the nature of the generator nor the generated. Given that light is a simple reality – on the basis of the same logic we outlined above for the sun – the point of the light imagery is that it illustrates the profound unity between the generated and the generator that must be preserved if the generator is simple.

The consubstantiality condition collapses the Valentinians' protology, should they seek to interpret their emissions *tanquam a sole radii*. The aim of the Valentinian system is to account for creation on the basis of a drama in the spiritual realm (Pleroma). This drama, as we have seen, involves the ignorance of the First-Father amongst the emitted Aeons (apart from the Only-Begotten). This ignorance in turn provokes the rise of passion in Wisdom which led to her Fall. According to Irenaeus, if the Aeons are emitted *tanquam a sole radii*, then it will be impossible to find either ignorance of the First-Father or passion in them. Given that the First-Father is impassible (which Irenaeus presumes the Valentinians affirm) he cannot generate something that is opposite in nature with himself, namely, passions. Further, it would be absurd to say that the First-Father lacks knowledge of himself. But if he possesses perfect knowledge of himself, then on a similar reasoning, it will be impossible for the First-Father to generate something that is

ignorant of himself. Irenaeus frequently rehearses both of these arguments on the basis of the consubstantiality condition.<sup>169</sup> If Valentinian *probole* is to be compatible with divine simplicity, then their protology will simply fall apart.

#### B. Principle 2b: Co-temporaneity

The light metaphor also illustrates a second condition of the grammar of generation required by divine simplicity. If two things are consubstantial, Irenaeus writes, then in the case of one generated from the other, we cannot relate them in a temporal ordering. Returning to the example of lighting torches, Irenaeus writes:

For a torch that is lighted later will not have a different light from that which existed earlier. Wherefore, when the lights of these torches are brought together into one, they regain their original unity, since *there results one light that existed even from the beginning*. And one cannot tell that one is younger or older by the light itself – for the whole is one light – or by the torches themselves that received the light (for these were contemporaneous in their material substance, since the matter of the torches is one and the same), but only according to the lighting, since one was lit a short while ago, but another just now.<sup>170</sup>

Neque enim quae postea accensa est facula alterum lumen habebit quam illud quod ante eam fuit. Quapropter et lumina ipsorum composita in unum in principalem unionem recurrunt, cum fiat unum lumen quod fuit et a principio. Quod autem iuuenius est et antiquius neque in ipso lumine intellegi potest – unum enim lumen est totum – neque in ipsis quae perceperunt lumen faculis – etenim ipsae secundum substantiam materiae idem tempus habent: una enim et eadem est facularum materia – , sed tantum secundum accensionem, quoniam altera quidem ante pusillum, altera autem nunc accensa est.

This is a difficult passage because Irenaeus's point is subtle. Imagine if we bring back together the various torches lit up from a single source. Obviously, the lights will recombine into a single light. Now what happens to the status of the various generated lights, having been recombined? Irenaeus' first point is that this recombination results in 'the one light that existed even from the beginning (*unum lumen quod fuit et a principio*)'. He suggests that the process of recombination

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<sup>169</sup> *Haer.* II.13.3-4, II.17.3, 5-6 (rejecting the possibility of passion arising in the Pleroma), *Haer.* II.17.5, 8-11 (rejecting the possibility of ignorance arising in the Pleroma).

<sup>170</sup> *Haer.* II.17.4 (emphasis added).

enables one to recover the single source from which the lights on the other torches had been generated. He then asks: what is the relative temporal status between the generated lights, now that they are recombined as one light? When the lights are recombined, can we still identify their relative temporal status so that one is earlier than the other? Irenaeus' full answer is complex but I wish to highlight one particular point he made. According to Irenaeus, with respect to the *substance* of light, we cannot differentiate the relative temporal status amongst the various generated lights. Irenaeus' argument consists of one single sentence: *unum enim lumen est totum*. In other words, the light that is lighted later is not a different light than one that existed earlier. Rather, *qua* substance, the two are one and the same. Consequently, the recombined lights as a whole make one light. For Irenaeus, consubstantiality has implications about the relative temporal status between the lights. Given the generated lights are consubstantial with each other, when they recombine we are left with the whole light that existed as one in the beginning. This means that after recombination, we cannot tell the relative temporal status amongst the different generated lights anymore because all the generated lights have no other differentiators between them apart from their previous relative temporal status (e.g. one is lit after/before another). So when the lights recombine, we simply cannot distinguish one that was generated earlier and from one that was later. This suggests that consubstantiality between the different generated lights implies that *qua* lights – that is, with respect to their substance – they are co-temporal. In other words, *qua* substance, one generated light cannot be differentiated from another temporally.<sup>171</sup>

What is the point of this argument? In my view, Irenaeus is suggesting that given consubstantiality, co-temporaneity *qua* substance also follows from simplicity. Thus if a simple

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<sup>171</sup> There is, however, one way Irenaeus thinks we can differentiate the relative temporal status between the generated lights after their recombination: with respect to the process of lighting. When the lights are recombined, the only difference marker left between them is that some are lit before others. It is difficult to determine what Irenaeus means precisely. But perhaps he is thinking of something like this. If two lights, A and B, are recombined, they are no longer two *qua* lights (and *qua* torches). This is because they are consubstantial. As a result, there will be no relative temporal ordering between them *qua* lights once they are recombined. However, A and B retain one way in which they are distinguished as two: with respect to the relative order of generation. Given that (say) A is generated before B, after recombination we can still identify A as generated temporally before B even though they have now become one light (and so it is impossible to be differentiated their relative temporal status *qua* lights). It is unclear what Irenaeus means by this but perhaps we can speculate. If we turn to the recombine light, we cannot point to one part and say that it is generated earlier than another part. This is because *qua* light, the recombined light is one and the same. However, what we can say is that this recombined light is lit *now*, whereas the lights used in the recombination were lit *earlier*. In other words, it is still possible to analyse the relative temporal status not between the various lights used in the recombination, but between them and the newly recombined. Perhaps this is what Irenaeus wishes to suggest by insisting that the only way to distinguish A and B when they are recombined is with respect to their order of generation.

source generates something consubstantial with itself, that what is generated is co-temporal with itself *qua* substance. *Qua* substance, what a simple source generates cannot be differentiated from itself according to their relative temporal status. The details of Irenaeus' argument here are difficult to pin down, which is troublesome because this argument has obvious ramifications for Trinitarian theology. But for now, we must remain in the Valentinian polemical context because it illustrates the utility of this argument. The immediate polemical value of Irenaeus' argument lies on the point that two generated lights cannot maintain their relative temporal status *qua* lights if they were generated *tanquam a sole radii*. So should the Valentinians conceive their emissions *tanquam a sole radii*, they will not be able to maintain the distinct ordering of their Aeons *qua* spiritual substances (i.e. *qua* being part of the Pleroma). As a result, the distinct temporal ordering of the emission of Aeons will be incompatible with the claim that all Aeons are part of one spiritual Pleroma.<sup>172</sup>

What we have seen is that in addition to consubstantiality, Irenaeus suggests a further requirement on the grammar of generation required by simplicity. If God is simple, then what he generates *qua* substance cannot possess a relative temporal ordering with himself. It is clear that in Irenaeus simplicity leads to two implications for the nature of the generator-generated relation, which are best illustrated from the metaphor of lights from light. This can be summarised as follows:

### ***Irenaeus' second principle of unity***

2. Divine simplicity implies that something must be generated *tanquam a sole radius*. This mode of generation is characterised by:
  - a. (*Consubstantiality*): what is generated is similar, single in form, equal in every way, with its source
  - b. (*Co-temporaneity*): *qua* substance, what is generated does not possess a relative temporal ordering with its source

### ***Irenaeus and the 'identity thesis'***

By now, it should be clear that Irenaeus, in his anti-Valentinian polemic, recognises two principles of unity that must be satisfied by modes of generation compatible with divine simplicity. In this final section, I shall show briefly how Irenaeus' distinctive expression of divine

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<sup>172</sup> 'For how can one Aeon be called younger or older among them, since the light of the whole Fullness is one?' (*Haer.* II.17.5).

simplicity – his ‘identity thesis’ – connects with the two principles we have just elaborated. As I noted at the beginning of the chapter, Irenaeus seems to affirm divine simplicity as entailing what scholars call the ‘identity thesis’. This is the idea that due to simplicity, (a) God is himself identical to all his perfections and (b) all his perfections are identical to one another. Given that Irenaeus’ language of the ‘identity thesis’ is intimately entangled with his critique of Valentinian *probolē* in the two chapters we have just analysed (*Haer.* II.13 and II.17), it is no surprise that the content of the ‘identity thesis’ must be understood in light of these two principles of unity.

According to *Haer.* II.13.3, God is ‘simple and not composite; with all members of similar nature, being entirely similar and equal to himself. He is all Mind, all Spirit, all Understanding, all Thought, all Word, all Hearing, all Eye, all Light, and the whole Source of all blessings.’<sup>173</sup> What Irenaeus attempts to express by this language is connected with the first principle of unity. By the ‘identity thesis’, Irenaeus is suggesting that we cannot conceive God’s perfections as generated *efficiabiliter et partiliter* from him. This in turn must be analysed with respect to the two ways in which we must avoid anthropomorphism under this principle. First, God’s perfections – his Mind, Word, Wisdom, etc. – cannot relate to him as a human offspring relates to her mother. The reason is straight-forward: God is incorporeal and so cannot be divided in a corporeal manner. Second, God’s perfections cannot relate to him as though they were different stages of his mental activities. We have already examined the reason for this: God’s mind is unlike the human mind in that his activities are not restricted by the bodily organs. Human mental activities are distinguished into various stages only they are restricted by bodily conditions. God’s mental activities are totally free from these restrictions because he is not composite. Consequently, *Haer.* II.13.8 affirms that ‘God is all sight and all hearing – for he sees in the same way that he hears, and he hears in the same way that he sees –...God is all Mind and all Word, and that as far as he is Mind, he is also Word, and that his Word is this Mind.’ Irenaeus’ language here simply affirms that God’s mental activities cannot be distinguished into various stages due to his simplicity. Taking *Haer.* II.13.3 and II.13.8 together, Irenaeus’ ‘identity thesis’ entails that (a) God is not divisible into parts like bodies, (b) the activities of the divine Mind cannot be divided into distinct stages like human mental activities.

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<sup>173</sup> *Haer.* II.13.3 : simplex et non compositus et similimembrius et totus ipse sibimetipsi similis et aequalis est, totus cum sit sensus et totus spiritus et totus sensuabilitas et totus ennoia et totus ratio et totus auditus et totus oculus et totus lumen et totus fons omnium honorum, quemadmodum adest religiosis ac piis dicere de Deo. As scholars have noted, Irenaeus’ language of divine simplicity draws on the pre-Socratic philosopher Xenophanes. See Robert M. Grant, *Gods and the One God* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988), 89–90.

There is another way to understand the content of Irenaeus' 'identity thesis', namely, in light of our second principle of unity. God is 'identical' to his perfections, in the sense that there is perfect consubstantiality between himself and his perfections. What this means is that God and his perfections are perfectly one in the manner of the sun and its rays (or light and its source). Just as rays from the sun can only ever be bright, so God's perfections can only ever be in accordance with the divine nature. We cannot conceive of God and his perfections as differing in nature. So by claiming that God is 'identical' with his perfections, what Irenaeus is affirming is that none of the divine perfections could turn out to be contrary to the divine nature. Co-temporaneity offers a further sense in which God and his perfections are 'identical'. Given divine simplicity, it is not possible to have relative temporal ordering amongst God's perfections, as well as and between God and his perfections. In *Haer.* II.13.9, Irenaeus states that 'neither can anyone assert that Mind is more ancient than Life, for Mind itself is Life; or that Life is of later origin than Mind, lest he who is the Understanding of all things – that is, God – should at any time be without Life'.<sup>174</sup> If one divine perfection is emitted later than another, and if one perfection is understood as separate and distinct from the others, then we would have to consider how and when one could be in possession of the other. For instance, how could Mind/Word have Life, if Life was emitted *after* Mind/Word, as in the Valentinian account? For Irenaeus, such questions are impossible for the simple God. There is no time in which God is without his perfections because God's perfections have no relative temporal ordering, as well as between God and his perfections: 'As a matter of fact, Mind, Word, Life, Incorruptibility, Truth, Wisdom, Goodness, and all other perfections are heard together with God's name.'<sup>175</sup>

This brief analysis reveals that Irenaeus' 'identity thesis' simply states the underlying premise for the two principles of unity. Given that God cannot be divided into parts like bodies, he cannot generate in the manner of animals or humans. Given that the activities of the divine Mind cannot be divided into distinct stages of development, he cannot generate mental entities like human minds. Given that God's perfections can only be in harmony with his nature, he can only generate that which is consubstantial with him. Given that God can never be without his perfections, he can only generate that which is co-temporal with him *qua* substance. In each case, the premise is expressed in the form of the 'identity thesis' and the result is expressed in the principles of unity. This is how the 'identity thesis' relates to the two principles of unity.

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<sup>174</sup> Et neque sensum uita antiquiorem aliquis potest dicere, ipse enim sensus uita est; neque uitam posteriorem a sensu, uti non fiat aliquando sine uita is qui est omnium sensus, hoc est Deus. (*Haer.* II.13.9)

<sup>175</sup> *Haer.* II.13.9.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the need to refute Valentinian *probolē* provided Irenaeus an opportunity to develop two crucial principles for the grammar of generation involving a simple God. As I have shown, these principles outline the conditions for any process of generation to be compatible with God's simplicity. Further, it is indeed accurate to say that Irenaeus holds some kind of 'identity thesis' which serves as the premise of the two principles of unity. But I have argued that Irenaeus' affirmation of the 'identity thesis' should not distract us from recognising the profound significance of his critique of Valentinian *probolē*. In his critique, Irenaeus conceives a proto-Trinitarian problem regarding the nature of generation compatible with divine simplicity. On the one hand, as the reader must have anticipated by now, Irenaeus' grammar of generation is highly suggestive of the Trinitarian questions regarding the generation of the Son. His analysis of generation *tanquam a sole radii* brings up significant Trinitarian ideas such as consubstantiality and eternal generation. On the other hand, Irenaeus' grammar of generation also seems inadequate if applied directly to the generation of the Son. Irenaeus' principles of generation cannot be straightforwardly connected to the specific problem of the Son's generation because his anti-Valentinian polemic did not consider the status of the generated-generator distinction. As a result, Irenaeus' grammar of generation is ambiguous regarding the exact status of how the generated is *distinct* from the generator. As formulated, Irenaeus' principles would probably imply that if the Son is generated from the Father, then he is identical to the Father in a crucial sense, namely, that the Son could be re-united with the Father as one single divine being. Such a position will become difficult to entertain after the Monarchian controversy. Consequently, the Irenaean reflections on the implication of simplicity for generation remain proto-Trinitarian.



## CHAPTER 4

### *I and the Father are (ἐσμέν) one' (Jn 10.30)*

#### Monarchianism and the 'Fully Trinitarian' Problematic

For Irenaeus, Valentinian *probolē* subjects God to an anthropomorphic process of generation wherein what is generated exists separately from the generator. Fuelled by anti-Valentinian polemic, Irenaeus' stresses that the simple God cannot generate that which is other than himself. Rather, God and what he generates must be 'one and the same', as in the case of light generated from light.<sup>176</sup> Hence God is 'identical' with what he generates in that he is consubstantial and co-temporal with them. The Irenaeian logic, however, leads to a serious difficulty for Trinitarian theology. If God's simplicity means that he must be 'one and the same' with what he generates, then could we not also apply this logic to the generation of the Son? If so, then does divine simplicity require the dissolution of the distinction between the Father and Son, given that the doctrine requires the two to be identical to each other?

This chapter considers the potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and the affirmation of the Father-Son distinction. To do so, I offer a brief examination on the Monarchian controversy. The term 'Monarchian controversy' refers not to a single controversy, but to a series of controversies occurring in the late second and early third century.<sup>177</sup> Geographically, these controversies spanned Asia Minor and Rome. Hence it is a significant theological controversy in the ante-Nicene period. Crucially, the Monarchian controversy is the major doctrinal episode which impacted early Christian reflections on the nature of the distinction between Father and Son. As a result, the details of the Monarchian controversy will likely shed light on the key issues for early Christian theologians when it comes to conceiving the relationship between divine simplicity and the affirmation of the Father-Son distinction.

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<sup>176</sup> *Haer.* II.13.2.

<sup>177</sup> For a brief history of Monarchianism, I find Bardy's account most helpful. Gustave Bardy, "Monarchianisme," ed. Alfred Vacant, E. Mangenot, and Emile Amann, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1929), vol. 10.2. Bardy provides a useful historical narrative as well as engages with most of the critical questions surrounding Monarchianism. The Monarchian controversy stands at the centre of the doctrinal context in the third century Roman Church. This is because two popes – Zephyrinus and Callistus – were both Monarchianis of some sort. See Ronald E. Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 49, no. 1 (1998): 56–91. Heine provides an excellent reconstruction of Callistus' theology which is representative of the state of Roman theology in the third century. Heine also provides an insightful reconstruction of the Stoic philosophical background to Monarchianism, as well as a helpful characterisation of third century Monarchian contexts (both Asian and Roman).

This chapter is divided into two sections. First, I draw a clear differentiation between Monarchianism and divine simplicity. This is necessary because modern theologians have recognised the questions I raised at the beginning, and are troubled by the fact that divine simplicity seems to entail Monarchianism.<sup>178</sup> For modern theologians, somehow the church Fathers seem to have missed the obvious logical connection between the two positions. Given the prominence of this concern in modern theology, I explain the main reason why early Christian theologians did not identify divine simplicity with the logic of Monarchianism. This is because a more careful consideration shows that Monarchianism and divine simplicity addresses two different theological problems. Divine simplicity asks: what characterises an account of God worthy of him? Whereas Monarchianism asks: how many divine persons are acting and speaking in Scripture? As a result of this key difference, I suggest that divine simplicity and Monarchianism are two different theological positions. However, in the second part of this chapter, I show that modern theologians' worry is not entirely unwarranted. There is indeed a potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and the anti-Monarchian affirmation of distinctions between the divine persons. But this potential incompatibility is considerably more complex than its standard formulation (the 'logical problem'<sup>179</sup>) by modern theologians. The key is found in the Son's generation, where we find a potential incompatibility between the anti-Monarchian affirmation of the Father-Son distinction, and the anti-Valentinian rejection of something emitted *efficabiliter et partiliter* based on divine simplicity. As I shall demonstrate, Tertullian, one of the major anti-Monarchian theologians in the third century, recognises a similar problem in his *Adversus Praxean*. Taking the two parts of my argument together, I suggest that while the modern theologian's hunch that divine simplicity entails Monarchianism is inaccurate, her underlying suspicion is not entirely unwarranted. An account of generation that only considers the implications of divine simplicity – like the one in Irenaeus – would be potentially incompatible with the anti-Monarchian affirmation of Trinitarian distinctions. Consequently, the proto-Trinitarian problematic we have seen in the last chapter becomes fully-Trinitarian only when the potential incompatibility between simplicity and Trinitarian distinctions is taken into account.

## DIVINE SIMPLICITY AND MONARCHIANISM: TWO DIFFERENT THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

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<sup>178</sup> For modern analysis of the problem caused by the notion of "identity" on Trinitarian theology, see Hasker, *Metaphysics and the Tri-Personal God*, 59.

<sup>179</sup> As discussed in the introduction.

It is true that the logic of divine simplicity resembles the logic of Monarchianism. In both positions, we find a concern for divine unity that leads to some form of dissolution of plurality. In the case of divine simplicity, God is to be identified with Scriptural terms attributable to him (e.g. Word, Wisdom, etc.) because there is no instance in which God is not one with them. As we have seen in Irenaeus, the plurality of divine perfections must be ultimately characterised by a unity such that each is considered to be ‘identical’ to God himself in the specific senses I set out in the last chapter. Similarly, in Monarchianism, God is identified with the divine Son (and the Holy Spirit) on grounds of monotheism. According to the Monarchians, if (a) God is one, and (b) Jesus Christ is divine, then one must conclude that the divine Son of God is identical to God the Father. In both divine simplicity and Monarchianism, the affirmation of unity renders the plurality involved as lacking ultimate reality. But this analogy between simplicity and Monarchianism is somewhat misleading because the two positions are essentially addressing different theological questions. In what follows, I shall briefly examine the key sources of the Monarchian controversy in order to demonstrate that the debate primarily concerns *prosopological* exegesis. As a result, Monarchianism addresses a theological problem quite different from that addressed by divine simplicity.

#### *Monarchianism as an Exegetical Position*

The Monarchian controversy is centred on the problem of prosopological exegesis.<sup>180</sup> Prosopological exegesis refers to the task of identifying ‘who is speaking to whom’ in Scripture. In Scripture, we find many passages where the answer to this question is not obvious.<sup>181</sup> Theologically, this problem becomes even more troublesome if we ask a variant form of the question: who in Scripture could be identified as a divine subject? In other words, how many actors or speakers in Scripture could be identified as possessing divine status? The Monarchian controversy is best understood in the context of this question.<sup>182</sup> For both sides – the

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<sup>180</sup> I have taken this term from a recent book by Matthew W. Bates, who in turn took it from Marie-Josèphe Rondeau. This term refers basically to the exegetical task to identify the *prosopa* – the roles or persons – in a dramatic setting. In a given Scriptural passage, can we identify correctly the distinct roles or persons in play so as to make sense of the passage? See Matthew W. Bates, *The Birth of the Trinity: Jesus, God, and Spirit in New Testament & Early Christian Interpretations of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), especially pp. 31-34. Throughout this section, I characterise the Monarchian controversy as a debate about prosopological exegesis in this sense.

<sup>181</sup> For example: Gen 1.26; Gen 18-9, 21.12; Ps 45.1, 6-9; Ps 110.1.

<sup>182</sup> See Michael Slusser, “The Exegetical Roots of Trinitarian Theology,” *Theological Studies* 29 (1988): 461–76. Slusser shows (pp. 466-8) that the propological exegetical questions in the Monarchian controversy were anticipated by Justin Martyr in the *Dialogue with Trypho*. My perspective on Monarchianism offered here is significantly in debt to Slusser’s article, who writes: “It was a method of literary and grammatical

Monarchians and anti-Monarchians – two crucial premises must govern our hermeneutic approach: (1) the belief in one God (monotheism) and (2) the belief that Jesus Christ is God (divinity of Christ). It would be uncontroversial to say that for Christian theologians in the third century, one must uphold both of these premises in some ways. What is controversial at the time is the implication of these premises for reading Scripture.

The referent for the term ‘Monarchian’ is complex and difficult to define. Influenced by Adolf von Harnack, scholars traditionally differentiate between ‘modalist’ and ‘dynamic’ Monarchianism.<sup>183</sup> Whether there were indeed two different kinds of Monarchianism is debatable. Moreover, it is likely that different Monarchian theologies underwent internal variations and developments.<sup>184</sup> Some Monarchians were also patripassians whereas others were not. There might also be a difference between early Monarchians and Sabellians. These historical difficulties notwithstanding, a single underlying concern unifies all the Monarchian theologies: monotheism.<sup>185</sup> The Monarchians were deeply concerned about the implication of affirming monotheism for making sense of Scripture. According to the Monarchians, if there is only one God, and if Jesus Christ is divine, then we must regard the Scriptural passages about the divine Son of God as having the same referent as passages about God himself. Consequently, if we identify the Father as God himself, then the divine Son and the Father must be *identical* to each other. For the Monarchian, this is the only available conclusion if one wishes to affirm monotheism and Jesus’ divinity together. Hippolytus and Tertullian both testify that monotheism lies at the heart of Monarchianism:

This is the way they are claiming to establish a single God. They reply to queries by saying, “Well, if I maintain that Christ is God, then he is the Father in person – if in fact he is God at all”.<sup>186</sup>

And in particular this one [Monarchianism] which supposes itself to possess truth unadulterated while it thinks it impossible to believe in one God unless it says that both Father and Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same<sup>187</sup>

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analysis of Scripture that provided the early Christian thinkers with a way to talk about God in a Trinitarian fashion.” (p. 475).

<sup>183</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, vol. 3 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1907), 1–118.

<sup>184</sup> This is the perspective suggested by Heine. See Heine, “The Christology of Callistus.”

<sup>185</sup> Bardy, “Monarchianisme,” 2194–95.

<sup>186</sup> CN 2.3.

<sup>187</sup> APrax. 2.

From our sources, it is clear that the Monarchian arrived at the identification of the Father and Son through exegesis. According to Hippolytus, Noetus of Smyrna – perhaps the founder of Monarchianism – built an exegetical case for Monarchianism through a number of Scriptural verses.<sup>188</sup> In Ex 3:6 and Ex 20:3, God pronounces to Israel that ‘you shall have no other gods besides me’. In Isa 44:6, we read that ‘I am the first, and I am the last, and in addition to me there is no one.’ Bar 3:36 states that ‘This is our God. No other will be compared to him.’ What these verses have in common is a particular language for affirming monotheism: there is no other besides the one God. According to Noetus, these verses to imply that God is the ‘one alone’ (ὁ μόνος), and so there can be no another (ἕτερος) divine person or being besides him.<sup>189</sup> Given this interpretation, accordingly, Noetus and his followers argue presumably in the following manner:

- (1) There is only one God, the Father, besides whom there is no other
- (2) Jesus Christ is God

Therefore

- (3) Jesus Christ is identical to the Father.

It seems that Noetus understood (3) to be an inevitable implication of the Scriptural passages given by Hippolytus. It is unclear whether Noetus formulated his position in the technical form that there is only one divine *person* in Scripture. However, what is clear is that Noetus drew the following exegetical conclusion: given the Father must be identified with the Son as a consequence of monotheism, the whole of Scripture must be read as though that there is only *one* acting and speaking divine subject in Scripture. Logically, Noetus affirmed patripassianism: ‘The Father is himself Christ; he is himself the Son; he himself was born, he himself suffered, he himself raised himself up’.<sup>190</sup> Thus Monarchianism originated as an exegetical-hermeneutical claim about the implication of monotheism for prosopological exegesis.

The Monarchian treatment of two passages in the Gospel of John illustrates the nature of Monarchian exegesis. Jn 10.30 and Jn 14.9-11 are central for all Monarchians because these

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<sup>188</sup> CN 2.

<sup>189</sup> By the time when Hippolytus wrote *Contra Noetum*, the term was already controversial (see Justin, *Dial.* 55-62). While Hippolytus did not explicitly attribute a technical use of the term ἕτερος to Noetus, from the key passages (Ex 3.6; 20.3; Bar. 3.36-38) used by Noetus, we can gain that the term was central to his conception of monotheism. The fact that the use of ἕτερος was under question is further supported by the careful explanation offered by Hippolytus in CN 11.1. According to Hippolytus, when he uses the term ἕτερος, he does not mean two gods. This clarification suggests that Hippolytus anticipates that Noetus would object to the term of the term due to the violation of monotheism.

<sup>190</sup> CN 3.2.

passages lend themselves well to Monarchian exegesis.<sup>191</sup> The Monarchians interpret Jn 10.30 as Jesus teaching that he himself is God the Father.<sup>192</sup> It is easy to imagine how this conclusion is obvious in the Monarchian framework where there can only be one divine subject in Scripture. Hence the Monarchians take Jn 10.30 as further justification for their approach that whenever the divine Son is speaking or acting, it is the *Father* who is acting. For the Monarchians, this reading of Jn 10.30 is further supported by Jesus' response to the question posted by Philip in Jn 14.9-10: 'Have I been with you so long, Philip, yet you do not know me? He who has seen me has seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?' The Monarchians interpret these verses as suggesting that Jesus is once again teaching that the Father and the Son are identical.<sup>193</sup> Even though our polemical sources do not provide us with the details of the Monarchian argument, it is not difficult to imagine the details. First, if one sees the Father when one sees the Son, then one could argue that this is because the Son is the Father. Second, one could argue that the preposition 'in' simply indicates identity in Jn 14.10. If the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son, then their identities simply overlap – in other words, they are the same person. For the Monarchians, Jn 14.9-10 provides further evidence that Monarchian exegesis makes sense of Scripture.

We do not know whether the Monarchians systematically applied this exegesis to the whole of Scripture. But what we have seen suffices to characterise the basic contours of Monarchianism. First, Monarchianism is primarily driven by the desire to maintain monotheism and the divinity of Jesus Christ together. According to the Monarchians, the only solution is to hold that the Father is identical to the divine Son, a solution justified by Scriptural passages such as Ex 3.6, Isa 44.6 and Bar 3.36-38. Secondly, as a result of the Son's identification with the Father, Monarchian exegesis posits only one divine subject in the drama of Scripture. Whenever Scripture mentions a divine subject acting or speaking, the Monarchians interpret Scripture as referring to the same God. This approach to prosopological exegesis has numerous implications. For instance, a dialogue between two divine subjects would be impossible. Further, the Monarchian position will look for an explanation for any difficult passages in light of their

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<sup>191</sup> In all but one of our contemporary sources, these two passages were mentioned and received a full treatment from anti-Monarchians. See *CN* 7; *APrax.* 20; *Trin.* 27.1, 28.2. The only source that did not mention this, namely, the *Refutatio*, deliberately withholds the exegetical character of Monarchianism in order to portray the teaching as originated from the philosophy of Heraclitus. See Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," 60.

<sup>192</sup> *CN* 7.1; *APrax.* 22; *Trin.* 27.1-2

<sup>193</sup> *CN* 7.4; *APrax.* 24; *Trin.* 28.2-30.

presupposition that there is only one divine subject in Scripture.<sup>194</sup> Thus Monarchianism is best understood as an approach to prosopological exegesis, grounded on the implication of monotheism, that rules out the possibility of having more than one divine actor in Scripture.

### *The Exegetical Nature of Anti-Monarchian Arguments*

In response, the anti-Monarchians argue that it is theologically problematic to identify only one divine subject in Scripture. As we shall see, anti-Monarchians offer a more careful reading of Scripture in order to refute their opponents on exegetical grounds. The anti-Monarchians propose instead that one must identify *two* acting subjects – the Father and the Word, his Son – in order to make better sense of the drama of Scripture. For the anti-Monarchians, it is not necessary to follow the Monarchians to restrict our reading of Scripture to only one divine subject in order to preserve monotheism and Jesus’ divinity together. Rather, anti-Monarchians argue that it is possible to have a plurality of divine subjects while maintaining monotheism. In the case of the Father and his Son, as long as it is possible to construe the Father-Son relation as one and undivided, it is possible to maintain both the plurality of divine subjects in Scripture and monotheism together. Thus the anti-Monarchian position differs from the Monarchian position precisely on the question of how many persons (*prosopa*) could be identified as possessing divine status in Scripture. For the Monarchians, there is only *one*. For the anti-Monarchians, there are *at least two*.<sup>195</sup>

The key strategy of the anti-Monarchians is to show that the Monarchian position is exegetically problematic. The anti-Monarchians attempt to out-exegete their opponents by carrying out a better reading of the Scriptural text measured by the grammatical reading techniques of the time.<sup>196</sup> Anti-Monarchians regard Monarchian exegesis as methodologically flawed. Apart from the critique of Monarchianism in Ps-Hippolytus’ *Refutatio omnium haeresium* based upon the writer’s peculiar attempt to trace the root of all heresies in philosophy, all extant

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<sup>194</sup> A good illustration of this is Jn 2.19 (‘destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up’). Origen reports a Monarchian interpretation that attempts to read this passage in conjunction with 1 Cor 15.15, a passage that suggests God as the one who raised Christ, in order to conclude that the *prosopon* speaking in Jn 2.19 is the Father himself. See *ComJn* X.246. This example illustrates how Monarchians will look for possibilities to interpret a given passage so that the meaning is compatible with the presupposition that there is only one divine acting and speaking subject in Scripture.

<sup>195</sup> I do not deal with the Holy Spirit here because it lies outside the scope of this study, which is primarily concerned with the Father-Son relation.

<sup>196</sup> Mark DelCogliano, “The Interpretation of John 10:30 in the Third Century: Anti-Monarchian Polemics and the Rise of Grammatical Reading Techniques,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 6 (2012): 117–38.

anti-Monarchian critique is grounded on the same basic point, namely, that the Monarchians have failed to pay careful attention to Scripture in their exegesis.<sup>197</sup> A brief examination of one of the key anti-Monarchians techniques – close grammatical observations – will clarify my point.<sup>198</sup>

In the first place, the anti-Monarchians point to a small set of key passages where the grammatical structure of a given passage requires a clear distinction between the Father and the Son. Two examples illustrate how this works in anti-Monarchian arguments. First, in Gen 1.26, we read: ‘Let us make man after our image and likeness’. Both Tertullian and Novatian draw on the use of the plural here in support of the thesis that the Father and the Son are distinct.<sup>199</sup> In the Monarchian perspective, since there is only one single God, the obvious interpretation of Genesis 1 would be that there is one *prosopon* in this involved in the activities of creation. But if this is so, why do we find the plural pronoun in this verse? According to Tertullian, the use of the plural here indicates a plurality of divine *prosopa* in this chapter. Tertullian argues that this is the only acceptable interpretation. Either God is deceptive in speaking in the plural when he should have spoken in the singular, or, as the Jews have it, God was merely speaking to the angels given that they do not recognise the existence of the Son in the Old Testament. For Tertullian, these alternatives are untenable for the Christian theologian. Rather, in light of the Gospels, the correct interpretation is that God was always with the other two divine persons, even in the act of Creation: ‘...there [in Genesis] already was attached to him the Son, a second Person (*secunda persona*), his Word...for that reason he spoke in the plural, ‘Let us make’ (*faciamus*), ‘our’ (*nostram*), and ‘of us’ (*nobis*).’<sup>200</sup> Further, Tertullian suggests that this interpretation is proven by other Scriptural passages. In Gen 1.27, the text did not simply state that God made man in his own image. If the Monarchians were correct – that there is only one person speaking – then it would have been written that man was made ‘in his own image’. But in fact, it was written in Gen 1.27 that ‘in the image of God he made him’. On the basis of these grammatical observations, Tertullian argues that God did not make man in his own image, but specifically in the image of the Son. The use of the plural thus indicates that the Father and the Son are distinct even in the beginning of Scripture.

A second example is found in the anti-Monarchian treatment of the crucial passage for the Monarchians: Jn 10.30. This passage received a detailed treatment from Hippolytus,

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<sup>197</sup> That is Hippolytus’ *Contra Noetum*, Tertullian’s *Adversus Praxean* and Novatian’s *De Trinitate*.

<sup>198</sup> This is by no means the only exegetical technique the anti-Monarchians used to refute Monarchianism. See DelCogliano, “The Interpretation of John 10:30,” 125–32 for examples of other arguments.

<sup>199</sup> *APrax.* 12; *Trin.* 27

<sup>200</sup> *APrax.* 12.



Tertullian and Novatian, further illustrating how significant it was for the Monarchian position.<sup>201</sup> All three anti-Monarchians make use of an argument based on close grammatical exegesis. Hippolytus argues that the Monarchians failed to attend to the use of the plural in Jn 10:30: 'I and the Father are (ἐσμέν) one'.<sup>202</sup> The plural ἐσμέν is used only when there are two or more persons are involved. For Hippolytus, this point is further clarified by Jesus' words in Jn 17, where we read that the Father and Son are one. According to Hippolytus, since it is absurd to think that the body of Christ (e.g. the Church) *is* (ἐστίν) one 'in terms of substance' (κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν), likewise it is absurd to think that the Father and the Son *is* one in this manner.<sup>203</sup> Here, we have a problematic usage of 'substance' which will be beyond the scope of our discussion here. But it reveals the most crucial yet trickiest issue in Trinitarian theology: does the affirmation of 'one substance' deny any distinction between the Father and Son, ending up with the Monarchian position? Hippolytus' usage seems to suggest that this is the case, whereas Tertullian is happy to use *una substantia* to denote the unity between the Father and the Son that will respect the distinction between the two.<sup>204</sup> This subtlety notwithstanding, Hippolytus' argument is clear enough. If the body of Christ *are* one, respecting the plurality of individuals involved, then on the basis of Jn 17, likewise we must understand the unity indicated by Jn 10:30 as a kind of unity that preserves the existing plurality between the Father and the Son. Consequently, we must regard the Father and Son as *two* divine subjects in Scripture.

We find a similar argument in Tertullian. First, Tertullian argues that 'I and the Father' (*Ego et pater*) is an indication that they are two. Here, Tertullian is highlighting the use of two nominative subjects in the passage. Second, similarly to Hippolytus, Tertullian points out that the use of the plural verb 'are' (*sumus*) is another indication that there are two, since 'are' is not spoken of one but of more than one. Third, in this passage we read 'are one (*unum*)' in the neuter, and not 'are one (*unus*)' in the masculine. For Tertullian, this indicates clearly that the sense of unity indicated by the verse is not that of one single person. For if this was the case, then the masculine *unus* would be used to indicate this:

...when he says that two, of the masculine gender, are one, in the neuter – which is not concerned with singularity but with unity, with similitude, with conjunction, with the love of the Father who loveth the son, and with the love of the Father

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<sup>201</sup> CN 7; *APrax.* 22; *Trin.* 27.

<sup>202</sup> CN 7.1.

<sup>203</sup> CN 7.2-3.

<sup>204</sup> *APrax.* 2, 12. See Ernest Evans, ed., *Tertullian's Treatise Against Praxeas. The Text Edited, with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary.* (London: S.P.C.K, 1948), 39–45.

who loveth the Son, and with the obedience of the Son who obeys the Father's will – when he says, one are I and the Father, he shows that those whom he equates and conjoins are two.<sup>205</sup>

For Tertullian, the grammatical features of Jn 10.30 suggest that, contrary to the Monarchian interpretation, there are clearly two divine persons in this verse.

Novatian's anti-Monarchian exegesis of Jn 10.30 recapitulates what we have seen in Hippolytus and Tertullian, but with further details. First, Novatian argues that when the Son said 'I and the Father', the use of the 'and' signifies that the Son wishes to differentiate himself from the Father. This is because the Son would have said 'I, the Father, am I' if the Monarchian position is correct. However, the text reads 'I and the Father', which for Novatian establishes the distinction between the Father and Son.<sup>206</sup> Second, following Tertullian, Novatian points out that *unum* is used, not *unus*. Novatian's explanation is very interesting and borders on the language of 'social Trinitarianism':

And since He said "one" thing (*unum*), let the heretics understand that He did not say "one" person (*unus*). For one placed in the neuter, intimates the social concord, not the personal unity. He is said to be one neuter, not one masculine, because the expression is not referred to the number, but it is declared with reference to the association of another.<sup>207</sup>

Third, this time highlighting a point made by both Hippolytus and Tertullian, Novatian argues that *sumus* was used in the plural, indicating that the Father and the Son are two persons: 'For He would not have added "We are" (*sumus*), if He had had it in mind that He, the only and sole Father, had become the Son.'<sup>208</sup> Novatian's exegesis of Jn 10.30 shows well that the anti-Monarchian critique of Monarchianism was carried out based on close grammatical observations on the Scriptural text.

#### *The difference between Monarchianism and Divine Simplicity*

The preceding analysis shows that the Monarchian controversy was primarily preoccupied with the question of prosopological exegesis. The point at stake was whether the

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<sup>205</sup> *APrax.* 22.

<sup>206</sup> *Trin.* 27.2.

<sup>207</sup> *Trin.* 27.4.

<sup>208</sup> *Trin.* 27.5.

whole of Scripture is better explained according to Monarchian or anti-Monarchian exegesis. On the one hand, on the basis of key passages like Isa 44.6 and Bar 3.36-38, the Monarchians argue for a prosopological exegetical framework that is consistent with monotheism. On the other hand, on the basis of close grammatical observations, the anti-Monarchians established a comprehensive case against Monarchian exegesis. The upshot of the preceding analysis is that we must not mistake Monarchianism as simply a piece of ‘modalist logic’. It is true that Monarchianism involves the logic that (a) if there is one God, and (b) if the Father and Son are both divine, then it follows that the Father must be identical to the Son. But Monarchianism as a theological position is much more than this simple syllogism. As I have shown, the anti-Monarchians clearly recognise Monarchianism as a theological position equipped with a distinctive hermeneutics. The exegetical nature of anti-Monarchian arguments reveal that Monarchianism stands or falls depending on how certain Scriptural passages are read and interpreted. Without the exegetical arguments, we would lose all the nuances surrounding the Monarchian position. Monarchianism is therefore better identified as an exegetical framework to make sense of Scripture on the basis of only one divine subject.

Consequently, given the nature of the Monarchian controversy, Monarchianism as a theological position is quite different from the doctrine of divine simplicity. On the one hand, as we have seen in Part I of this study, divine simplicity is concerned with the question: what characterises an account of God that is worthy of his divinity? Early Christian theologians like Origen insist that God must be simple. This is because a theology worthy of divinity requires that (a) the divine nature be perfectly self-same, and (b) the divine character be perfectly free from internal contradictions. On the other hand, as we have seen, Monarchianism is concerned with the question: how many divine persons are acting and speaking in Scripture? Monarchians argue that monotheism implies that the answer must be *numerically* oneness. There could only be one divine acting and speaking subject in Scripture. Consequently, the *same* subject must be identified in all passages involving God. It is true that both divine simplicity and Monarchianism are *grammatical* in function, meaning that both sets out some hermeneutical rules to regulate our understanding of Scripture. However, as we have seen, divine simplicity is concerned with regulating how we understand the meaning of language for God in Scripture, whereas Monarchianism is concerned with regulating how many divine subjects could be identified in the Scriptural narrative. Thus I suggest that in ante-Nicene theology, the two positions answer different theological questions and possess different grammatical functions to regulate theological discourse. This important difference explains why ante-Nicene theologians never considered divine simplicity to entail Monarchianism.

## FROM THE PROTO-TRINITARIAN TO THE FULLY-TRINITARIAN PROBLEMATIC

So far, I have argued that divine simplicity and Monarchianism must be carefully differentiated. But divine simplicity might in fact pose a problem to the anti-Monarchian position. As we have seen, anti-Monarchians argue on the basis of their exegesis that Father and Son are two divine subjects. They are not identical to each other. This stance however raises a potential issue: could the Son's distinction from the Father be the result of a materialistic process akin to the Valentinian *probolē*? In the last chapter, we have seen that Valentinian *probolē* is interpreted by Irenaeus uncharitably as leading to the generated possessing a kind of separated existence from the generator. It is easy to see why a Monarchian might raise the above objections to the anti-Monarchian. If the Son and the Father are two, as the anti-Monarchians insist, then surely the former must be emitted *efficabiliter et partiliter* from the latter? Here is where divine simplicity could enter: if the anti-Monarchian emphasis indeed implies a kind of Valentinian *probolē*, then it seems incompatible with divine simplicity. This is because, as we have seen in Irenaeus, simplicity is incompatible with *probolē* as a model for generation.

From our sources, we do not find the problem posed with reference to simplicity explicitly. However, terminologies aside, we have one important piece of evidence that anti-Monarchians were aware of the potential objection that their position could lead to Valentinian *probolē*. In Tertullian's *Adversus Praxean*, he addresses the issue directly: does anti-Monarchianism necessarily lead to Valentinian *probolē*? Given that *Aprax.* 8-9 forms part of Tertullian's direct response to Monarchianism, it is probable that the Monarchians used the issue as an objection to anti-Monarchian theology. The exact nature of the connection between Monarchianism and anti-Gnosticism is far from certain. What we can say is that the question was sufficiently immediate for Tertullian to feel the need to draft a detailed response. So it is probable that both Monarchians and anti-Monarchians were aware of the potential connection between the anti-Monarchian position and Valentinian *probolē*.

Let us now turn to Tertullian's response because it sheds light on the potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and Monarchianism. According to Tertullian, the heart of the question concerns the interpretation of the term *probolē*. For Tertullian, it is true that the anti-Monarchian position must lead to some kind of *probolē* which results in the Son as a person

(*persona*).<sup>209</sup> However, the crucial issue is whether *probole* must be understood in a sense that causes division (*divisio*), thus separates (*separat*) the Father and Son akin to the manner in which the Valentinian Aeons are separated from the First-Father.<sup>210</sup> If so, then the anti-Monarchian position is indeed guilty of proposing a problematic kind of *probole* which would diminish the Father by the generation of the Son, and violate the unity of the divine monarchy. At this point, we can see why Irenaeus' grammar of generation cannot be straightforwardly applied to the Son's generation. Tertullian asks: must every emission that results in the generation and the generator being *two* lead to Valentinian *probole*? If we pose the question in Irenaeus' terms: must the Son be emitted *efficiabiliter et partiliter* in order for him to be a distinct person from the Father? Irenaeus' grammar of generation is silent on this question. It is unclear whether Irenaeus' analysis implies that his rejection of Valentinian *probole* entails the Monarchian position. It will be impossible to determine Irenaeus' answer because he did not explicitly deal with Monarchianism. But the fact that Irenaeus' analysis could not address the problem suggests that further analysis is required. In Tertullian, we find that the question concerning generation is posed in a more complex manner. Unlike Irenaeus, Tertullian sees the possibility of interpreting *probole* in a theologically appropriate manner. It is not necessary to take the idea as imposing divisions in God through the separation of the generated from the generator. Rather, the crucial issue concerns the nature of the *probole* in question. Thus in Tertullian, the question concerning the nature of generation is posed in a more sophisticated manner than we have seen in Irenaeus: how do we account for the Son's generation such that (a) it maintains the Father and Son as two distinct persons, without (b) subjecting the Father to divisions?

For Tertullian, as for Irenaeus, God the Father must not be diminished by the generation of the Son. This would inappropriately subject God to divisions. Tertullian – on a polemical reading similar to Irenaeus – rejects Valentinian *probole* because ‘Valentinus secludes and separates his “projections” from their originator, and places them so far from him that an aeon is ignorant of its father’.<sup>211</sup> In Irenaeus, the impossibility of subjecting God to divisions is argued on the basis of God's simplicity. Here, however, Tertullian did not make use of the language of simplicity (*simplicitas*). Although Tertullian equally forbids an account of *probole* that would subject

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<sup>209</sup> The Son as *persona* is the sense of his distinct existence that Tertullian needs to preserve in his account of generation. See *APrax.* 7: ‘Whatever therefore the substance of the Word was, that I call a Person, and for it I claim the name of Son: and while I acknowledge him as Son I maintain he is another beside the Father (*secundum a patre*)’. Thus *persona* for Tertullian captures his anti-Monarchianism, as indicated by the phrase *secundum a patre* in the last sentence

<sup>210</sup> *APrax.* 8.

<sup>211</sup> *APrax.* 8.

God to divisions, his reasoning is grounded instead on the divine monarchy.<sup>212</sup> I note this difference because once again, we need to bear in mind that divine simplicity was not part of the technical terminology in the Monarchian controversy. However, what is significant is that Tertullian's rejection of Valentinian *probolē* is based on the idea close to the heart of the technical notion of divine simplicity, namely, the lack of internal division. This similarity suffices to secure my point that Tertullian's analysis highlights a *potential* incompatibility between divine simplicity and the anti-Monarchian position.<sup>213</sup>

According to Tertullian, the anti-Monarchian emphasis on the Father and Son as two persons can be made compatible with the lack of internal divisions within the divine monarchy. The key is to differentiate between two kinds of plurality. Tertullian has various terminological pairs for this differentiation, of which a particularly helpful one is division (*divisio*) and distinction (*distinctio*). For Tertullian, *distinctio* between the generator and the generated is sufficient to differentiate the anti-Monarchian position from the Valentinian position that leads to *divisio*. As Orbe has conjectured, Tertullian's solution could be understood also in terms of the differentiation between *portio* and *pars*.<sup>214</sup> According to Orbe, Tertullian maintains that the Son is not a part of God that is separated from the Father. Rather, the Son is a portion of God that proceeded from him. *Portio* thus results from *distinctio* that does not diminish the generator, whereas *pars* signifies the consequences of *divisio* that violates the generator. For Tertullian, differentiation between *distinctio-divisio* and *portio-pars* shows that the anti-Monarchian position does not necessarily lead to Valentinian *probolē*.

For...I say that the father is one, and the Son another...not however that the Son is other than the Father by diversity, but by distribution, not by division but by distinction, because the other is not identical with the Son, they even being numerically one and another. For the Father is the whole substance, while the Son is an outflow and assignment of the whole<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> *Monarchia* is Tertullian's primary way of speaking about the lack of divisions in God. *APrax.* 3-4, 8.

<sup>213</sup> As I shall argue, in Origen, the connection between simplicity and anti-Monarchianism is more clearly seen. See Chapter 5.

<sup>214</sup> See the fascinating exploration in Orbe, *Hacia I/2*, 2:584–603. Orbe argues that this distinction is equivalent to the distinction between *κατὰ μερισμὸν* and *κατὰ ἀποκοπήν* in Tatian, *Ad Graec.* V. While Orbe's thesis is conjectural, what seems clear is that in the ante-Nicene period, there is a theological awareness between two kinds of "distinctions" that could result from the process of generation: one that preserves unity between the generator and the generated, and the other compromises this unity.

<sup>215</sup> *APrax.* 9.

...enim dico alium esse patrem et alium filium...non tamen diversitate alium filium a patre sed distributione, nec divisione alium sed distinctione, quia non sit idem pater et filius, vel modulo alius ab alio. Pater enim tota substantia est, filius vero derivation totius et portio

For Tertullian, the best illustration for how *distinctio/portio* can arise in generation is found in three similar metaphors: ‘as a root brings forth the ground shoot, and a spring the river, and the sun its beam.’<sup>216</sup> In these metaphors, we can distinguish the source (the ‘parent’) from the generated (the ‘son’). The generated is not identical to the generator. Rather, ‘the root and the shoot are two things, but conjoined; and the spring and the river are two manifestations, but undivided; and the sun and its beam are two aspects, but they cohere’.<sup>217</sup> For Tertullian, the three metaphors demonstrate clearly how it is possible to consider the generated as a distinct reality *beside* the generator without compromising the unity between the two. In this way, the Son is generated from the Father without being ‘separated’ from him, thus causing divisions to the divine monarchy.

Tertullian’s approach to the generation of the Son illustrates how there might be a potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and the Father-Son distinction. Without the anti-Monarchian emphasis to clarify the nature of the Father-Son distinction, Irenaeus’ insistence on divine simplicity could well lead to an account of the Son’s generation that compromises his distinct existence. While divine simplicity is not part of Tertullian’s technical vocabulary, I suggest that Tertullian recognises a similar issue. As we have seen, Tertullian’s solution is to make a clear differentiation between two kinds of plurality: *divisio/pars* will indeed subject God to internal divisions in God whereas *distinctio/portio* will not. For Tertullian, such a differentiation suffices to offer the clarity needed in a grammar of generation to maintain a plurality between the Father and Son while avoiding Valentinian *probole*. In Origen, we shall encounter similar theological moves designed to address the same theological problem.

In the last chapter, I argued that Irenaeus’ analysis of the grammar of generation constitutes only a ‘proto-Trinitarian’ problematic. By now, it should be clear that this is because Irenaeus did not clarify whether the grammar of generation required by simplicity would allow any room for plurality between generator and generated. Tertullian’s analysis of the problem brings us from Irenaeus’ ‘proto-Trinitarian’ to the ‘fully-Trinitarian’ problematic because he raises a clarification question that sharpens the problematic of the Son’s generation. If the Father

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<sup>216</sup> *APrax.* 8.

<sup>217</sup> *APrax.* 8.

and Son are two, would the Son's generation lead to internal divisions in the Father? While the question posed by Tertullian did not use the terminology of simplicity – which is Middle-Platonic – there is no doubt that this question will be felt by theologians like Origen as raising a potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and the anti-Monarchian position. Tertullian's analysis thus significantly clarifies the Trinitarian problematic concerning the implication of divine simplicity for the Son's generation.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have argued that the relation between divine simplicity and Monarchianism is complex. Modern analyses of this relation are inadequate because they do not sufficiently attend to the differences between the two. However, I have also shown that the hunch underlying modern analyses is not entirely unwarranted. There is indeed a potential incompatibility, albeit only revealed through the question of the Son's generation. Synthesising what we have seen in this chapter and the last, I suggest that the doctrinal-polemical context in the third century leads to the following problematic. Starting from one side: Is it possible to maintain the anti-Valentinian emphasis on the Son's continuity with the Father's nature (refuting Valentinian *probolē*), without falling into the Monarchian position that the Son and the Father are one and the same subject? Starting from the other side: Is it possible to maintain the anti-Monarchian emphasis on the Son's non-identity with the Father (such that there are two divine acting subjects in Scripture), without introducing Valentinian *probolē* that divide the Father? To put it succinctly: must we fall either into Valentinian *probolē* or Monarchianism? In Chapter 6, I shall argue that this is the exact shape of the problematic faced by Origen. But first, it is to Origen's anti-Monarchianism that we now turn. This is because it is in Origen's anti-Monarchianism where we find divine simplicity functioning in a way that we have not seen so far in our Trinitarian exploration.



## CHAPTER 5

### *'The Father is Greater than I' (Jn 14.28)*

#### Divine Simplicity as an Anti-Monarchian Principle of Differentiation between the Father and Son

Many people who wish to be pious are troubled because they are afraid that they may proclaim two Gods and, for this reason, they fall into false and impious beliefs. They either (1) deny that the individual [property] (ιδιότηα) of the Son is other than (ἐτέραν) that of the Father by confessing him to be God whom they refer to as “Son” (υἱόν) in name at least (μέχρι ὀνόματος), or (2) they deny the divinity of the Son and make his individual property and determinate essence to be different from the Father (τιθέντας...αὐτοῦ τὴν ιδιότητα καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν κατὰ περιγραφὴν τυγχάνουσιν ἐτέραν τοῦ πατρὸς).<sup>218</sup>

Moreover, not without danger may those be associated with the Church's membership who say that (2) the Lord Jesus was a man, foreknown and predestined, who before his coming in the flesh had no substantial and proper existence (*qui ante aduentum carnalem substantialiter et proprie non extiterit*), but that, because he was born human, he possessed only the deity of the Father within him (*Patris solam in se habuerit deitatem*). The same applies to those...(1) wishing to avoid the appearance of saying that there are two Gods, and yet having no intention of denying the deity of the Saviour, claim that the Father and the Son have one and the same substance (*unam eandemque subsistentiam Patris et Filii adseuerant*). That is to say, they indeed say that the deity receives two names according to the diversity of causes (*duo quidem nomina secundum diuersitatem causarum reciientem*), yet there exists a single ὑπόστασις, that is, one underlying person with two names (*unam personam duobus nominibus subiacentem*).<sup>219</sup>

There are, for example, all the heretics who certainly announce the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; but they do not announce well or faithfully. For either (2) they wrongly separate the Son from the Father, when they say that the Father is of

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<sup>218</sup> *ComJn* II.16 (Heine's translation slightly modified).

<sup>219</sup> *ComTi* apud Pamphilus, *Apol.* 33 [7].

one nature and the Son is of another nature, or (1) they wrongly confuse them, when they imagine...that he is merely referred to by three names.<sup>220</sup>

It is tempting to approach Origen's reflections on the unity and distinction between the Father and Son in light of later Trinitarian controversies. Many scholars have approached Origen with the later fourth century background in mind. The result is a mixed picture: Origen has been made both a sinner and a saint. On the one hand, questions have been raised regarding the Orthodoxy of Origen's Trinitarian theology retrospectively: was Origen a 'proto-Arian' or 'subordinationist'? Did Origen differentiate the Father and the Son in a manner that resembles later 'Arian' theology?<sup>221</sup> On the other hand, it is frequently highlighted that Origen was the source of many key elements in pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology, not least his insistence on the eternal generation of the Son<sup>222</sup> and the language of three divine hypostases.<sup>223</sup> Origen's Trinitarian theology is much less frequently read in light of his third century polemical contexts.<sup>224</sup> In the three passages cited above, we have – in Origen's own words – a critical account of the Trinitarian situation in his time. Origen did not directly name his opponents, but

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<sup>220</sup> *ComRm* VIII.5.9.

<sup>221</sup> The concern for this agenda clearly underlies certain strands of Origenian scholarship. See for instance J. Nigel Rowe, *Origen's Doctrine of Subordination: A Study in Origen's Christology*, 1 edition (Berne ; New York: Peter Lang AG, 1987); and Christoph Bruns, *Trinität und Kosmos: Zur Gotteslehre des Origenes* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2013) This most recent comprehensive treatment of Origen's Trinitarian theology indeed recognises the two contexts I have highlighted here. But unfortunately, the agenda of the author is still set by the "retrospective" question, as pointed out by Mark Edwards in his review of the book in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 66.2 (2015): 390-391.

<sup>222</sup> See Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God*, 67–92 for a discussion of Origen on this theme.

<sup>223</sup> See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "Origen, Greek Philosophy, and the Birth of the Trinitarian Meaning of Hypostasis," *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 3 (2012): 302–50. While Ramelli has a scholarly agenda to argue for her narrative concerning the development of Trinitarian theology, her article certainly provide an illuminating discussion of the doctrine in Origen's thought. For an in depth discussion of the topic in light of its philosophical background, see Henning Ziebritzki, *Heiliger Geist Und Weltseele: Das Problem Der Dritten Hypostase Bei Origenes, Plotin Und Ihren Vorläufern* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).

<sup>224</sup> There are exceptions, of course. See Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:387–452; Manlio Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel IV secolo* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1975), 11–15; Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: SCM Press, 2009), 143–44; Samuel Fernández, "La Generación Del Logos Como Solución Al Problema Monarquiano, Según Orígenes," in *Multifariam. Homenaje a Los Profesores A. Meis, A. Bentué y S. Silva.*, ed. Samuel Fernández, J. Noemi, and R. Polanco (Santiago, 2010), 193–229; Samuel Fernández, "Verso La Teologia Trinitaria Di Origene: Metafora e Linguaggio Teologico," in *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer*, ed. Sylwia Kaczmarek, Henryk Pietras, and Andrzej Dziedowiec (Leuven; Paris; Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011), 457–73; See especially Alastair H.B. Logan, "Origen and the Development of Trinitarian Theology," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck-Wien: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 424–29, who also identifies an anti-Monarchian function in Origen's doctrine of the three hypostases.

both of the groups mentioned by Origen probably refer to ‘Monarchians’ of some sort.<sup>225</sup> On the one side (those labelled (1) above), some have over-stressed the unity between the Father and the Son so as to dissolve the proper distinction between them. This group, who sacrifices the individual personality of the Son for the sake of monotheism, most likely refers to ‘modalist Monarchians’. As I have noted in Chapter 3, the historical referent of ‘Monarchianism’ as a whole is difficult to pin down. Here, in the case of Origen, this term could refer for the very least to Beryllus of Bostra<sup>226</sup>, the wider context of Origen’s *Dialogue with Heraclides*<sup>227</sup>, and the Roman Monarchians Origen met during his visit to Rome.<sup>228</sup>

On the other side (those labelled (2) above), others have instead over-emphasised the distinction between the Father and the Son. They postulate the Son as mere man, thus different in essence (or nature) from the Father. Here, Origen likely refers to the adoptionists – those who held that Christ’s divinity was by adoption rather than by nature.<sup>229</sup> It is probable that Origen specifies these two groups together because they represent opposite tendencies. Whereas modalists over-stress the unity between the Father and Son, adoptionists over-stress instead the distinction. But Origen may also group the modalists and adoptionists together because he recognises the underlying similarities between them. Both deny the pre-existence of the divine Son of God.<sup>230</sup> Wishing to avoid ditheism, modalists argue that before the Incarnation there is

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<sup>225</sup> Our efforts to identify these groups are significantly aided by the following works: Antonio Orbe, “Origenes y Los Monarquianos,” *Gregorianum* 72, no. 1 (1991): 39–72; Heine, “The Christology of Callistus.”

<sup>226</sup> See Eusebius, *HE*, VI.33.1.

<sup>227</sup> See Henry Chadwick and J. E. L. Oulton, eds., *Alexandrian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 430–34.

<sup>228</sup> On the difficult but important question concerning Origen’s historical relation with Monarchianism, see the most detailed modern treatment of Heine with respect to the Roman side of the question in Heine, “The Christology of Callistus” Origen could be referring to Callistus’ theology, or to Sabellian theology which utilises more technical terminologies. ; See also Stephen E. Waers, “Wisdom Christology and Monarchianism in Origen’s Commentary on John,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 60, no. 3–4 (n.d.): 96–98 offers a clear introduction and a detailed survey of the literature, once again, with respect to the more restricted question on the relation between Origen and Roman Monarchianism. It is hoped that Waers’ projected publication of his book-length treatment will provide greater details on Origen’s relation with all forms of Monarchianism in the third century.

<sup>229</sup> This group consistently appears on Origen’s heretical reports. See also *ComJn* XXXII.193 and *DialHe.* 4.

<sup>230</sup> I am convinced that this is a crucial doctrinal detail that unites all Monarchians (modalists and adoptionists). This is the judgement supported by Heine’s detailed work too. Heine, “The Christology of Callistus,” 71. As Heine pointed out here, the difference between modalist and adoptionist monarchianism likely lies in the manner in which the historic Christ “became” (in time) divine. On the one hand, the modalists brought the divine and human together at Jesus’ conception; on the other hand,

only one divine *hypostasis*,<sup>231</sup> the Father himself. There is no pre-existent divine Son because the Son *became* divine through conjoining with the Father's divine Spirit in the Incarnation. Wishing to avoid ditheism too, adoptionists agree with modalists concerning the existence of only one divine *hypostasis*. For adoptionists, there is no pre-existent divine Son because during his baptism, he adopted the divine Spirit of the Father.<sup>232</sup> Thus both modalists and adoptionists are Monarchians, affirming that the divinity of the Son is identical to the Father; and both deny any pre-existent divine *hypostasis* who is another besides the Father.

Origen's testimonies reveal that he faced two extreme versions of Monarchianism in his third century Trinitarian context. The aim of this chapter is to show that Origen's use of divine simplicity must be situated in the context of his anti-Monarchian polemic.<sup>233</sup> Origen draws on divine simplicity as a principle of differentiation between the Father and the Son. This may seem surprising, especially for modern theologians. In modern theology, divine simplicity is received as a principle of divine unity that potentially overwhelms the Trinitarian distinctions. How could it be that divine simplicity serves to differentiate, rather than to identify, the Father and the Son? The question arises because of a deeper problem concerning who or what should be considered simple in Trinitarian theology. The difficulty arises for those who are accustomed to think of divine simplicity as applied to the divine essence shared by the three persons. The identification of the shared divine essence as simple is found in the pro-Nicene Trinitarian theology of the fourth century.<sup>234</sup> From this perspective, it is indeed impossible to conceive of simplicity as a principle of differentiation between the divine persons. Given the significance of fourth century pro-Nicene theology for Christian Orthodoxy, it is reasonable to presuppose that after the fourth century, it is the divine essence which is simple. But when we come to an ante-Nicene theologian like Origen, this presupposition is no longer valid.<sup>235</sup> For Origen, it is the Father alone who is simple. The Son, who is the Christ and the saviour, admits multiplicity in a sense that the Father does not. As a result, with respect to simplicity, the Father is to be contrasted with the Son. It is

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the adoptionists at Jesus' baptism. However, both positions share the common denial of a pre-existent Son of God before the historic Christ. .

<sup>231</sup> I am not here committed to whether the technical language of one hypostasis belongs to the Monarchians themselves. I am simply narrating the teachings of the Monarchians from Origen's point of view.

<sup>232</sup> Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," 71.

<sup>233</sup> My argument will primarily focus on the 'modalists'. Thus in what follows, when I use the term 'anti-Monarchian', it refers mainly to Origen's 'anti-modalist' tendencies.

<sup>234</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 278–301; Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz, "Doctrine of God," 874–76.

<sup>235</sup> Stead has already recognised that there are different ways to apply divine simplicity in the context of the relation between the Father and the Son. See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 163–66; This point is also recognised by Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz. See Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz, "Doctrine of God," 874.

the Father's essence who is endowed with the perfect self-sameness we have seen in Chapter 2, and not the Son. Consequently, the Father's simplicity differentiates him from the Son:

God, therefore, is altogether one and simple. Our Savior, however, because of the many things, since God 'set' him 'forth as a propitiation' and firstfruits of all creation, becomes many things, or perhaps even all these things, as the whole creation which can be made free needs him.<sup>236</sup>

ὁ θεὸς μὲν πάντῃ ἓν ἐστὶ καὶ ἀπλοῦν. ὁ δὲ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν διὰ τὰ πολλὰ, ἐπεὶ προέθετο αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον καὶ ἀπαρχὴν πάσης τῆς κτίσεως, πολλὰ γίνεται ἢ καὶ τάχα πάντα ταῦτα, καθὰ χρήζει αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐλευθεροῦσθαι δυναμένη πᾶσα κτίσις

Origen's use of divine simplicity in this passage may surprise modern theologians, but it is in line with the philosophical systems of his time.<sup>237</sup> According to Numenius of Apamea, "The first god...is simple, and being together with himself throughout can never be divided. The second and third god, however, is one. He comes into contact with matter, but it is dyadic and, although he unifies it, he is divided by it."<sup>238</sup> Inspired probably by a reading of the first and second hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides*, Numenius differentiates between the first principle (a simple unity) and the second/third principle (complex unities that are not purely simple). Similarly, for Origen's great Alexandrian predecessor Clement, "God is the One (*str.* 5.12.81 *et passim*) and...beyond the world of ideas (*str.* 5.6.38). The Logos is also one, a complex unity into which the believer is united (*str.* 4.25.156f). The Father is simple, and purely single reality; and the Son is complex, a single reality in multiplicity."<sup>239</sup> So the differentiation between two divine principles based on the simplicity/complexity contrast is common in Origen's period.<sup>240</sup> This much is well-known. What is less often recognised, however, is that Origen's hierarchical account of the Father-Son relation was developed for resolving issues that are comprehensible only in light of the third century Trinitarian context I have outlined at the beginning. Hence my aim in this chapter is to set out a case for reading the hierarchical structure in Origen's Trinitarian theology

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<sup>236</sup> *ComJn* I.119.

<sup>237</sup> Ziebritzki, *Heiliger Geist Und Weltseele*; Stead, *Divine Substance*, 164, 186–87; Stead, "Divine Simplicity," 262; Ayres and Radde-Gallwitz, "Doctrine of God," 874.

<sup>238</sup> Numenius, Fr. 11 (des places).

<sup>239</sup> Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology*, 53.

<sup>240</sup> According to Stead, the differentiation between an absolute simple first God and a "second" God who is one-many became necessary due to the need to explain how the simple God could govern the world of change and multiplicity. Such a differentiation subsequently gained support from a particular reading of Plato's *Parmenides* and was eventually passed down to the Christian writers. See Stead, *Divine Substance*, 93–94.

as a response to Monarchianism, in order to better situate our understanding of divine simplicity as a principle of differentiation.<sup>241</sup> I highlight that what is unique in Origen is the scriptural-exegetical case for the commonplace differentiation in this period between the first and the second divine *hypostasis*. From this reading, I suggest that Origen’s hierarchical Trinitarian theology was constructed as a piece of exegetical-philosophical theology that serves a specific polemical function, namely, to refute Monarchianism. Origen’s use of divine simplicity as a principle of differentiation therefore constitutes an *anti-Monarchian* emphasis in his theology.

## ORIGEN AND HIS CRITIQUE OF MONARCHIANISM

We must begin with the identification of Origen’s anti-Monarchianism. This task is not straight-forward because as an exegete, Origen criticises the Monarchians mostly *en passant* as part of the task of Scriptural interpretation. As a result, he did not usually elaborate on the terms of his critique, nor did he set out a systematic case against Monarchianism as such. But here we shall make a brief attempt at characterising Origen’s anti-Monarchianism. The critical remarks on Monarchianisms scattered across Origen’s corpus possesses one striking feature. In his description of Monarchian theology, Origen utilises almost every single technical term related to Trinitarian metaphysics. He claims that the Monarchians rejected the following kinds of distinctions between the Father and the Son:

- a. Distinction with respect to hypostasis (καθ’ ὑπόστασιν)
- b. Distinction with respect to personal property (κατ’ ιδιότητα)
- c. Distinction with respect to substrate (καθ’ ὑποκείμενον)
- d. Distinction with respect to essence (κατ’ οὐσίαν)

The clearest dimension of Origen’s anti-Monarchianism is found at the level of *hypostasis*. In *CCels.* VIII.12, Celsus objects to the Christian practice of worshipping Jesus as another alongside the one supreme God. In reply, Origen cites Jn 14.11 and Jn 10.30 to show that Christians do not worship two gods, because the Father and the Son are one God. Immediately, Origen addresses the Monarchian undertones in his response to Celsus. Origen rejects the Monarchian

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<sup>241</sup> My thesis was developed in its embryonic form by Logan long ago: ‘No doubt the latter [Origen] could claim Christian tradition, itself appropriating the Platonic Second Letter, in the formulation of his three hypostases doctrine, but he may well have been “persuaded” of the value of baptizing both the Valentinian terminology and its underlying Platonic metaphysical scheme (mediated also perhaps through Ammonius and Numenius?), as a weapon to refute his real opponents in the Commentary on John, Monarchians of various sorts. Logan, “Origen and the Development of Trinitarian Theology,” 426–6.

interpretations of Jn 14.11 and Jn 10.30 to safeguard his reply from being developed in a Monarchian direction:

“For the Father”, he says, “is in me and I in the Father”. (Jn 14.11; 17.21) If, however, anyone is perturbed by these words lest we should be going over to the view of those who deny that there are two *hypostases*, Father and Son, let him pay attention to the text ‘And all those who believed were of one heart and soul’, (Acts 4.32) that he may see the meaning of “I and my Father are one” (Jn 10.30). Accordingly we worship but one God, the Father and the Son, and we still have a valid argument against the others...Therefore we worship the Father of the truth and the Son who is the truth; they are two distinct hypostatic realities (δύο τῇ ὑποστάσει πράγματα), but one in mental unity, in agreement, and in identity of will (ἐν δὲ τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ καὶ τῇ συμφωνίᾳ καὶ τῇ ταυτότητι τοῦ βουλήματος).<sup>242</sup>

Origen characterises the Monarchian position as rejecting the belief that the Father and Son are two hypostatic realities. As we shall see in the next chapter, Origen develops a positive account of divine unity with respect to the Father and the Son’s ‘moral communion of mind and will.’<sup>243</sup> But for now, we simply note that according to Origen, the Monarchians falsely refused individual existence to the divine persons. According to Origen, the Monarchian error is found in the denial of the distinction between the Father and the Son καθ’ ὑπόστασιν. Origen’s critique of the Monarchians is clearest at the level of *hypostasis* because unlike in the case of the other terms, we know what alternative he had in mind: he clearly affirms the opposite thesis, namely, that the Father and Son are to be distinguished καθ’ ὑπόστασιν.<sup>244</sup> For Origen, the alternative to Monarchian theology is to affirm that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct divine *hypostases*. Thus at the level of *hypostasis*, the nature of Origen’s anti-Monarchianism is clear.

Next, we turn to *idiotēs*. According to *ComJn* II.16, the Monarchians also denied that the Son possesses individual property (*idiotēs*) which distinguishes him from the Father. The Monarchian argument presumably is that if (a) the Father and the Son are both divine, and (b) each possesses individual property, then we end up with two gods – two beings, each personally possesses the divine properties. Against this view, Origen accuses the Monarchians of ending up

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<sup>242</sup> *CCels.* VIII.12

<sup>243</sup> Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:438. See *ComJn* XIII.228-34; *PArch* I.2.6. This model of unity grounded on harmony of mind, will and act is clearly an anti-Monarchian strategy, as seen in Hippolytus (*CN* 14), Tertullian (*Aprax.* 3) and Novatian (*Trin.* XXVII.4). .

<sup>244</sup> See *ComJn* II.75; *HomLv.* XIII.4.

with a merely nominal affirmation of the Son. If the Son does not possess his own individual property, then how could he be an individual existence distinct from the Father? So far, everything is clear. But we learn something more about the Monarchians in this passage. As I have pointed out in the introduction, Origen pits the Monarchian position against an opposite, equally heretical, position which over-emphasises the distinction between the Father and the Son. Origen's description of this second position potentially causes a problem.<sup>245</sup> On first reading, Origen might end up with a contradiction here. How could both the rejection and acceptance of the Son's possessing individual property distinct from the Father be wrong? But if we read the sentence closely, it seems that Origen is rejecting the combination of the two conditions which make the second position an *over*-emphasis of the Father-Son distinction. The second position holds that not only the Father and the Son are distinct *κατ' ιδιότητα*, but also *κατὰ περιγραφὴν τῆς οὐσίας*. It is the latter clause in combination with the first that causes the issue. With this in mind, we can safely assume that Origen's critique of the second position did not contradict his critique of the first. Rather, the Monarchian error is to deny the Father-Son distinction *κατ' ιδιότητα*.<sup>246</sup> Thus the implication of Origen's critique on the basis of *idiotes* is clear: (a) it is incorrect to reject the Father-Son distinction *κατ' ιδιότητα*, but (b) it is also incorrect to affirm the Father-Son distinction *κατ' ιδιότητα* alongside with *κατὰ περιγραφὴν τῆς οὐσίας*, which results in a distinction that is too strong.

Now we turn to more difficult territory, namely, to *ousia* and *hypokeimenon*. It seems that the Monarchians have argued for their position based on the observation that both the Father and the Son are called 'light' in Scripture. If Scripture calls both by the same term, then surely the

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<sup>245</sup> Καὶ τὸ πολλοὺς φιλοθέους εἶναι εὐχομένους παρὰσσον, εὐλαβουμένους δύο ἀναγορεῦσαι θεοὺς καὶ παρὰ τοῦτο περιπίπτοντας ψευδέσι καὶ ἀσεβέσι δόγμασιν, ἥτοι ἄρνούμενους ἰδιότητα υἱοῦ ἑτέραν παρὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὁμολογοῦντας θεὸν εἶναι τὸν μέχρι ὀνόματος παρ' αὐτοῖς υἱὸν προσαγορευόμενον, ἢ ἄρνούμενους τὴν θεότητα τοῦ υἱοῦ τιθέντας δὲ αὐτοῦ τὴν ἰδιότητα καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν κατὰ περιγραφὴν τυγχάνουσιν ἑτέραν τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐντεῦθεν λύεσθαι δύναται. Reading from ἢ ἄρνούμενους τὴν θεότητα τοῦ υἱοῦ, „Origen describes a second position.

<sup>246</sup> A sharp-minded reader will detect a potential terminological muddle here. Given that Origen addresses both groups of Monarchians here – modalists and adoptionists – it would be more precise to say here that the denial of the Father-Son distinction *κατ' ιδιότητα* is the *modalist* error. I acknowledge this potential ambiguity here but it will not be possible to address this issue because it is beyond the scope of this chapter to investigate whether Origen's use of divine simplicity to differentiate between the Father and Son is exclusively anti-modalist or more broadly 'anti-Monarchian' (including both modalists and adoptionists). In order to clarify the whole issue, one would have to carry out a detailed investigation to differentiate (if this is at all possible based on available sources) Origen's anti-modalist theological moves from his anti-adoptionist moves. In this chapter, my presupposition is that Origen recognises the two versions of Monarchianism but his theological moves that are specifically 'anti-Monarchian' do not contain high enough resolution for us to differentiate his anti-modalist moves from his anti-adoptionist moves.



Father and Son share the same essence? If two horses are both ‘horses’ because they share one common essence (οὐσία), then did Scripture teach by the same logic that there is no distinction between the Father and the Son with respect to essence (κατ’ οὐσίαν)? In response, Origen writes:

Now since the Savior here is “light” in general, and in the catholic epistle of the same John, God is said to be light, one thinks it is confirmed from that source too that the Father is not distinct from the son in essence (τῇ οὐσίᾳ μὴ διεστηκέναι). But another who has observed more accurately and speaks more soundly will say that the light which shines in the darkness and is not overcome by it, and the light in which there is no darkness at all are not the same (οὐ τὰ αὐτὸν εἶναι).<sup>247</sup>

As we can see, Origen even accuses the Monarchians of rejecting the Father-Son distinction in essence (τῇ οὐσίᾳ). Origen does not explain the significance of his use of οὐσία language here, nor did he clarify what alternative he had in mind. On this passage, Orbe suggests that Origen affirms the opposite thesis, namely, that the Father is distinct from the Son in essence (τῇ οὐσίᾳ).<sup>248</sup> Is this what Origen is implying here? I think on the basis of this passage alone, it is unclear whether Origen affirms the opposite. What is clear is that for the Monarchians, the fact that two terms are applied to both Father and the Son implies that they are one in οὐσία. If this is indeed an accurate representation of the Monarchian view, then Origen rejects this move. For Origen, the fact that both the Father and the Son are called ‘light’ in Scripture need not imply that there is only *one* light. If we observe the use of ‘light’ in Scripture carefully, we must indeed distinguish two lights.<sup>249</sup> In making this move, Origen is simply repeating the strategy commonly found amongst anti-Monarchians, namely, to show that on the basis of close grammatical reading, the wider narrative of Scripture could make sense only if we postulate two divine subjects.<sup>250</sup> But from this passage, it is unclear whether Origen is using the term οὐσία in the same way as the Monarchians, if indeed the latter used οὐσία as a technical term at all.

We gain further clarity of Origen’s anti-Monarchianism in a passage which summarises everything we have seen. In *ComJn* X.246, Origen is commenting on Jn 2.19. Apparently, the

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<sup>247</sup> *ComJn* II.149.

<sup>248</sup> Orbe, *Hacia* I/1, 1:431–2. Subsequently, Orbe draws the connection between Origen’s anti-Monarchianism and the theology of Eunomius. If Origen indeed had the Father-Son distinction κατ’ οὐσίαν in mind in his polemic against the Monarchians, then by emphasising that the Son’s essence (*ousia*) is other than the Father, the Eunomian logic is somewhat “Origenian”. For Eunomius’ theology, see Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford ; New York: OUP Oxford, 2001).

<sup>249</sup> *ComJn* II.150–4.

<sup>250</sup> See DelCogliano, “The Interpretation of John 10:30.”

Monarchians used this passage in combination with other New Testament passages to show that their position can be deduced from reading Scripture data about Jesus' resurrection as a coherent whole:

Those, however, who are confused on the subject of the Father and the Son bring together the statement, "And we are also found false witnesses of God, because we have testified against God that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise," (1 Cor 15.15) and words like these which show him who raises to be different (ἕτερον) from him who has been raised, and the statement, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (Jn 2.19) They think that these statements prove that the Son does not differ from the Father in number (μὴ διαφέρειν τῷ ἀριθμῷ), but that both being one, not only in essence, but also in substance (ἐν οὐ μόνον οὐσίᾳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑποκειμένῳ), they are said to be Father and Son in relation to certain differing aspects (κατὰ τινὰς ἐπινοίας), not in relation to their reality (οὐ κατὰ ὑπόστασιν λέγεσθαι).<sup>251</sup>

In Jn 2.19, the Son teaches that he will raise himself up whereas in 1 Cor 15.15, Paul teaches that it is God – the Father – who raised Christ up after his crucifixion. For the Monarchians, the only coherent reading of these two passages is to say that the one who has raised himself up in the Son is indeed the Father himself. Whether this passage indeed reveals something about Origen's global account of how various Trinitarian terms relate to each other is debatable.<sup>252</sup> In my view, the definitive significance of this passage is found in that Origen utilises almost every imaginable term relevant to Trinitarian metaphysics in his characterisation of Monarchianism. Not only did he refer to *ousia*, *hypostasis*, *idiotēs*, but also *hypokeimenon*.<sup>253</sup> From our brief survey, what is

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<sup>251</sup> *ComJn* X. 246.

<sup>252</sup> See the suggestive conjectures in Orbe, "Origenes y Los Monarquianos," 45–48; Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:436–7.

<sup>253</sup> We have another testimony for the use of *hypokeimenon* in the context of Origen's anti-Monarchian critique: 'For if, as is shown elsewhere, the Son is different from the Father in person and in subject (ἕτερος...κατ' οὐσίαν καὶ ὑποκειμένον ἔστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ πατρὸς), we must pray either to the Son and not to the Father, or to both, or to the Father alone.' *PEuch* XV.1. See also *ComMt* XVII.14, when commenting on Mt 21.46, Origen attempts to safeguard this verse from those οἱ συγχέοντες πατρὸς καὶ υἱοῦ ἔννοιαν καὶ τῇ ὑποστάσει ἕνα διδόντες εἶναι τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν'. It is clear that he is referring to the Monarchians, who probably took this verse to support their claim that there was no pre-existing divine Son of God who possesses distinct individual existence. He then qualifies the Monarchian further with reference to *hypokeimenon*: 'τῇ ἐπινοίᾳ μόνῃ καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασι <μόνοις> διαιροῦντες τὸ ἐν ὑποκειμένον.' It seems that there must some intrinsic connection between the affirmation of one hypostasis and one *hypokeimenon* either for the original view of the Monarchians, or for Origen's understanding of their view.

therefore crystal clear from Origen's testimonies of Monarchianism is that for him, Monarchianism is such a severe threat that he would be willing to emphasise the distinction between the Father and Son using every conceivable metaphysical term.

In a way, our survey of Origen's anti-Monarchianism has established what we know intuitively: Origen rejects Monarchianism because he thinks that the position affirms monotheism at the expense of the distinction between the Father and Son. The answer to the crucial question, however, remains unclear: what kind of distinction between the Father and Son did Origen think we should affirm? Origen employs many technical metaphysical terms to characterise the Monarchian position, but as we have seen, he rarely elaborates on what he means by these terms.<sup>254</sup> What does he mean by the claim that the Monarchian rejection of the Father-Son distinction *κατ' οὐσίαν* compromises their distinction? In the face of this ambiguity, one approach is to follow Orbe by speculating, in light of Stoic and Neoplatonic categories, about the 'global' schema Origen might have had in mind. The result of Orbe's investigation is illuminating, but my approach takes a different direction.<sup>255</sup> I suggest the hierarchical structure of Origen's Trinitarian theology, defined by the Father's simplicity in contrast with the Son's multiplicity, actually offers a better location of his positive – anti-Monarchian – understanding of the Father-Son distinction. It is to this task that I now turn.

#### ORIGEN'S HIERARCHICAL FATHER-SON DISTINCTION AS AN ANTI-MONARCHIAN EMPHASIS

In *ComJn* I.119, Origen differentiates the Father as simple from the Son as multiple. This differentiation ultimately rests on Origen's approach to the divine perfections. Origen

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<sup>254</sup> In my view, this ambiguity in Origen's anti-Monarchianism serves as the primary source of the confusion in post-Origenian theology, exemplified by the dispute between Dionysius of Rome and Dionysius of Alexandria. The two Dionysii could not agree on what constitutes a heretical understanding of Trinitarian distinctions. For Dionysius of Alexandria, the *καθ' ὑπόστασιν* distinction constitute the only appropriate language to understanding the Father-Son distinction vis-à-vis Monarchianism (more specifically, Sabellianism). See Fr.11 in Charles Lett Feltoe, trans., *The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), 195–6. For Dionysius of Rome, however, his Alexandrian namesake seems to imply tritheism (the affirmation of *καθ' ὑπόστασιν* distinction between Father and Son is equivalent to affirming three gods). See the Roman bishop's letter in Feltoe, *The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria*, 176–82. For a detailed analysis on the controversy between the two Dionysii, see Manlio Simonetti, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo* (Roma: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 1993), 273–97.; In my view, Simonetti's account of post-Origenian theology remains the most convincing one available. See Manlio Simonetti, "The East after Origen," in *History of Theology Volume I: The Patristic Period*, ed. Angelo Di Berardino and Basil Studer OSB, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Collegeville, Minn: Michael Glazier, 1996), 192–204 for a brief summary in English.

<sup>255</sup> See note 249.

distinguishes three types of perfections: (a) perfections which the Father possesses absolutely and the Son derivatively, (b) perfections which the Father possesses in the Son, and the Son possesses absolutely, (c) perfections which the Father does not possess, and the Son possesses contingently. As I shall argue, the content of simplicity as a principle of differentiation between the Father and Son is best understood in terms of these three types of perfections. So before we turn to examine how Origen's schema renders the Father simple and the Son composite, the first step is to examine how Origen understood these three types of perfections.

#### A. Absolute Patrological Titles

In the first group, we have perfections of which the Father is the sole source and form. The classical examples frequently discussed by Origen are goodness, divinity, and immortality. With respect to these terms, the Father's essence (*ousia*) is essentially identical to them. This is usually expressed linguistically in Greek by the presence of the prefix *αὐτο-* or the definite article. The implication of this first group of perfections is not restricted to the Father, but extends to the Son as well. According to Origen, the Son possesses this group of perfections only derivatively. In other words, the Son participates in the Father in order to obtain these perfections. The first group of perfections thus fills out in a crucial manner how the Father-Son distinction is a *hierarchical* one for Origen: with respect to this group, the Father is essentially what the Son is only by participation. This is why I call these titles absolute Patrological titles.

In Origen's mind, the hierarchical nature of the Father-Son relation with respect to this group of perfections is grounded on a tightly connected scriptural logic, drawing particularly on the following verses: (a) Jn 1.1-2, (b) Jn 14.28, (c) Jn 17.3, (d) Mk 10.18, (e) 1 Tim 6.16, (f) 1 Jn 1.5. This Scriptural logic lies at the heart of what is unique to Origen's scheme in comparison with other Middle-Platonic or Neo-Platonic differentiations between the 'first' and 'second' god. Thus if we want to fully grasp Origen's scheme, we need to pay close attention to how he treats this tightly connected network of verses.

#### **The basic intuition: Jn 14.28 & Mk 10.18**

We begin by establishing Origen's exegetical basis for the core intuition underlying his hierarchal Trinitarian theology: the Father is *greater* than the Son. For Origen, the radical transcendence of the Father is grounded on two key verses: Jn 14.28 and Mk 10.18. Taken together, Origen infers that there must be a radical contrast between the Father and Son in order to make sense of these words issued by the Saviour. In *ComJn* XIII.151, we have the clearest articulation of this inference made by Origen from these two verses:

But we are obedient to the Saviour who says, “The Father who sent me is greater than I,” (Jn 14.28) and who, for this reason, did not permit himself to accept the title “good” (Mk 10.18) when it was offered to him, although it was perfectly legitimate and true. Instead, he graciously offered it up to the Father, and rebuked the one who wished to praise the Son excessively. This is why we say the Saviour and the Holy Spirit transcend all created beings, not by comparison, but by their exceeding pre-eminence. The Father exceeds the Savior as much (or even more) as the Saviour himself and the Holy Spirit exceed the rest (πάντων μὲν τῶν γεννητῶν ὑπερέχειν οὐ συγκρίσει· ἀλλ’ ὑπερβαλλούσῃ ὑπεροχῇ φαμέν τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὑπερεχόμενον τοσοῦτον ἢ καὶ πλεόν ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς, ὅσῳ ὑπερέχει αὐτὸς καὶ τὸ ἅγιον πνεῦμα τῶν λοιπῶν).<sup>256</sup>

For Origen, Jn 14.28 and Mk 10.18 indicate clearly that it is possible to praise the Son ‘excessively’ so that one regards him as greater than the Father in an inappropriate manner. For Origen, these two passages suggest that the Son did not want anyone to mistakenly elevate him to the level comparable with the Father. For to do so would violate monotheism, as Origen argues in *CCels.* VIII.14. According to Celsus, Christians are merely paying lip service when they say that they worship God alone. For Celsus, Christians endorse Jesus as the Son of God, implying that they exalt Jesus to the same level as God the Father. In response, Origen rebukes directly the view that some Christian believers might have deviated to, namely, that ‘the Saviour is the greatest and supreme God.’<sup>257</sup> Origen argues that this view is not correct because it contradicts Jesus’ teaching in Jn 14.28. Hence Origen reads Jn 14.28 as clearly ruling out the possibility of treating the Son of God as greater – i.e. more worthy of worship – than the Father. Here, Origen is not totally clear about whether from Jn 14.28, he would also rule out the possibility of treating the Son as co-equal with the Father as the greatest and supreme God. But from the context, it is safe to assume that Origen interprets Jn 14.28 as meaning nothing less than the fact that the Father alone is the greatest and supreme God. As a result, Origen argues that Christians do in fact ‘pay great reverence’ to the Father and worship him alone.

For Origen, the transcendence of the Father over the Son is similar to, or even greater than, the Son’s transcendence over creation. On this point, Origen’s precise view is unclear. In *ComJn* XIII.151, Origen does not specify which view he thinks is more correct. Elsewhere, he seems to assert the opposite view, namely, that with respect to goodness the Son exceeds the rest of

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<sup>256</sup> *ComJn* XIII.151.

<sup>257</sup> *CCels.* VIII.14.

creation more than the Father exceeds the Son.<sup>258</sup> However, what is clear is that for Origen, Jn 14.28 and Mk 10.18 teaches that the Father's greatness over the Son must be preserved: 'he [the Son] is not to be comparable with the Father in any way' (οὐ συγκρίνεται κατ' οὐδέν τῷ πατρὶ).<sup>259</sup>

### **Developing the intuition: 1 Tim 6.16, 1 Jn 1.5 & Jn 1.3**

For Origen, Jn 14.28 and Mk 10.18 provide the exegetical foundation for the basic intuition that there must be a sense in which the Father is greater than the Son. This intuition is supported by few further verses which, while not as explicit as Jn 14.28 and Mk 10.18, nonetheless give further evidence to the idea of the Father's radical transcendence. Further, this group of verses clarify the sense in which the Father is greater than the Son: the Father possesses a specific group of perfections in a manner that is absent in the Son.

First, in *ComJn* II.123-5, Origen combines Num 14.28 and 1 Tim 6.16 to argue that it is the Father who alone possesses life as *absolute immortality*, in contrast with the Son who does not possess life in this manner. According to Origen, Num 14.28 ('As I live, says the Lord') teaches that 'living in the proper sense...occurs with God alone'.<sup>260</sup> This 'living in the proper sense' is what 1 Tim 6.16 is attempting to teach about God, 'who alone has immortality'. But who should be attributed the sole privilege of possessing this immortality? Origen argues that immortality as 'living in the proper sense' must be attributed to the Father alone. This is because even the Son does not possess such immortality since he died for the sake of all who need salvation.<sup>261</sup> If the Son has immortality that is 'absolutely unchangeable and immutable', how could he be said to have 'tasted death for all'? Origen concludes from 1 Tim 6.16 that it is the Father who possesses immortality absolutely, because immortality in the absolute sense is absent in the Son. Consequently we must differentiate the Father's absolute immortality from the sense in which the Son is said to be 'life'.<sup>262</sup>

Origen obtains further scriptural support for the differentiation between the Father and Son. 1 Jn 1.5 states that 'God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.' Once again, Origen asks: to whom should we attribute this statement? According to Origen, it is not possible to say that there is no darkness in the Son because of his involvement in the salvific economy. He writes:

But we shall now more daringly add further to those words that if "him who knew no sin he made sin on behalf of us," (2 Cor 5.21) that is the Christ, it could not be

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<sup>258</sup> *ComMt* XV.10.

<sup>259</sup> *ComJn* XIII.152.

<sup>260</sup> *ComJn* II.123.

<sup>261</sup> See Heb 2.9.

<sup>262</sup> Jn 14.6.

said of him, “there is no darkness in him.” For if Jesus condemned sin “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8.3) by taking up the likeness of sinful flesh, it will no longer be completely accurate to say of him, “There is no darkness in him”<sup>263</sup>

Origen’s daring interpretation of 1 Jn 1.5 reflects that for him, it is not possible to present a clear cut division between the Son apart from the salvific economy and the Son who is involved in the salvific economy. For Origen, because the Son is involved in taking on our sins, infirmities and even death for our benefits, the Son therefore could not be said as ‘without darkness’. Hence only the Father could be the subject of the statement ‘there is no darkness in him’. The Father is a pure light, in contradistinction with the Son who is the ‘light of men’<sup>264</sup>, ‘true light’<sup>265</sup> and the ‘light of the world’<sup>266</sup> – a light that is pursued by darkness.<sup>267</sup> So for Origen, 1 Jn 1.5 suggests that the Father is light in an absolute sense that is absent in the Son.

As we have seen, in Origenian exegesis, both 1 Tim 6.16 and 1 Jn 1.5 must be read in conjunction with what we know about the Son from his involvement in the salvific economy. Inevitably we will be led to the conclusion that these verses can apply to the Father alone. However, Origen is aware of the potential objection that these things are blasphemous: is it not problematic to say that the Son does not possess, as the Father, absolute immortality and freedom from darkness? Origen replies:

For in the sense that the Father “alone has immortality,” because our Lord, on account of his love for man, took up death on behalf of us, in the same sense the Father alone has the quality expressed in the statement, “There is no darkness in him,” since the Christ, because of the benefit which follows for men, took our darkness upon himself that by his power he might destroy our death, and completely destroy the darkness in our soul<sup>268</sup>

This passage illustrates why Origen did not find any problem interpreting 1 Tim 6.16 and 1 Jn 1.5 in a way that seems to suggest that the Father is in some way greater than the Son. For Origen, the Son’s worthiness for human worship lies primarily in his willingness to take on sin and death for mankind – not, therefore, on the basis that he is equal with the Father by nature, but rather on the basis of what he has taken on for the sake of bringing man back to God. It is the Father

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<sup>263</sup> *ComJn* II.163.

<sup>264</sup> Jn 1.4.

<sup>265</sup> Jn 1.9

<sup>266</sup> Jn 8.12

<sup>267</sup> *ComJn* II.167-70.

<sup>268</sup> *ComJn* II.166.

whose worthiness for worship is grounded on the basis of his absolute immortality and purity as light. Consequently, Origen interprets 1 Tim 6.16 and 1 Jn 1.5 as unequivocally lending further support to a hierarchical Trinitarian theology where qualities such as ‘life’ and ‘light’ are possessed absolutely by the Father alone, and not the Son.<sup>269</sup>

### **The formalised scheme: Jn 1.1-2 & Jn 17.3**

Jn 14.28 and Mk 10.18 provide the basic exegetical foundation for the intuition that the Father is greater than the Son. This intuition is further supported by 1 Tim 6.16 and 1 Jn 1.5, each developing an aspect of the basic intuition that the Father possesses something absolutely in a sense that is absent in the Son. We will now turn to Origen’s formalised scheme that captures all that we have seen. In *ComJn* II.12-8, the basic intuition that the Father is greater than the Son in divinity finds a more formalised structure on the basis of Jn 1.1-2 and Jn 17.3. According to Origen, the triad of propositions in Jn 1.1-2 is given a unique ordering to indicate something profound about the nature of the Son’s divinity.<sup>270</sup> Since we find the proposition ‘And the Word was with God’ in the second place before the proposition ‘And the Word was God’, Origen postulates that ‘the ordering of the propositions could be so for the purpose that we might understand that the Word has become God because he is “with God” (ἵνα συνηθῇ ἀπὸ τοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεὸν εἶναι ὁ λόγος νοηθῆναι γινόμενος θεός)’.<sup>271</sup> In other words, Origen interprets the content of the second proposition – that the Word was ‘with God’ – as providing the basis for the validity of the third proposition – that the Word was God.

Origen further observes that in Jn 1.1-2, John used the Greek article in one place but not in another. We have ‘the Word’, but only ‘God’ without the article.<sup>272</sup> For Origen, John is not ambivalent about the rules of the Greek article, but rather he is making a substantial theological point:

For he [John] adds the article when the noun “God” stands for the uncreated cause of the universe, but he omits it when the Word is referred to as “God.” And as “the

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<sup>269</sup> This does not mean that the Son does not possess these qualities, but only that he does not possess them absolutely.

<sup>270</sup> *ComJn* II.11-2. For a detailed analysis of Origen’s anti-Monarchian approach to these verses, see Ronald E. Heine, “Stoic Logic as Handmaid to Exegesis and Theology in Origen’s Commentary on the Gospel of John,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 44, no. 1 (1993): 90–117.

<sup>271</sup> *ComJn* II.12.

<sup>272</sup> Origen is perhaps following Philo of Alexandria in making this distinction between God and ‘the God.’ This distinction is already found in Philo’s exegesis. See *De Somn.* I.229-30.



God” and “God” differ in these places, so, perhaps, “the Word” and “Word” differ.<sup>273</sup>

On Origen’s reading, the difference between ‘the God’ and ‘God’ is that with the article, one names the source (ἡ πηγή) for something.<sup>274</sup> The God who is ‘over all’ (ὁ ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεός) is the source of divinity. He is ὁ θεός, because the article is used for the ‘first’ (τῷ πρώτῳ) that serves as the source of that thing of which it is the first. However, the Word should not be called ‘the God’ because he is God in virtue of being ‘with God’.<sup>275</sup> The Word has ‘drawn divinity into himself’ through participation in the Father’s divinity.<sup>276</sup> As a result, the Word could not be regarded as the source of divinity himself. On this reasoning, Origen argues that the structure of Jn 1.1-2, as well as the absent of the article attributed to the Son in these verses, indicate that John is teaching a differentiation between ‘The God’ in whom divinity is grounded on oneself and thus greater, and ‘God’ (the Son) in whom divinity is grounded on participating in ‘The God’ and thus lesser.

Origen obtains further inspiration from John Gospel to explain this formalised structure of the intuition found in Jn 14.28. According to Origen, the Son’s prayer to the Father in Jn 17.3 indicates clearly the language that ‘The God’ is also called the ‘true God’ or ‘very God’. In *ComJn* II.17, he writes:

We must say to them that at one time God, with the article, is very God (αὐτόθεος), wherefore also the Savior says in his prayer to the Father, “That they may know you the only true God (μόνον ἀληθινὸν θεόν) (Jn 17.3).” On the other hand, everything besides the very God, which is made God by participation in his divinity, would more properly not be said to be “the God,” but “God.” (πᾶν δὲ τὸ παρὰ τὸ αὐτόθεος μετοχῇ τῆς ἐκείνου θεότητος θεοποιούμενον οὐχ ὁ θεός ἀλλὰ θεός κυριώτερον ἂν λέγοιτο).

Here, we have a passage that explains comprehensively how the Origenian scheme works. On the one hand, ‘The God’ refers to the ‘true God’ in Jn 17.3 to whom the Saviour prayed. A simple inference implies that ‘The God’ is the Father of the Son. This God is ‘very God’ (αὐτόθεος), in the sense that his divinity serves as the source of divinity for himself as well as for any other who

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<sup>273</sup> *ComJn* II.14.

<sup>274</sup> *ComJn* II.14-5.

<sup>275</sup> *ComJn* II.12, 18.

<sup>276</sup> *ComJn* II.17.

is called ‘God’. On the other hand, the ‘many gods’ mentioned by Scripture are made God by participation in the divinity of ‘The God’.<sup>277</sup> These gods who obtained their divinity in such a manner are said to be ‘besides the very God’ (παρὰ τὸ αὐτόθεος). By combining Jn 1.1-2 and Jn 17.3, Origen concludes that the Word was God in the latter sense: the Son participates in the Father – who is ‘The God’ and ‘true God’ – for his divinity. The language of ‘The God’, ‘true God’ and ‘very God’ thus offers Origen a way to formalise the basic intuition found in Jn 14.28 and Mk 10.18, namely, that the divinity of the Father must be greater than, and differentiated from, the divinity of the Son.

It is clear that for Origen, the formalised scheme is not only the foundation for divinity, but for the whole first group of perfections on the basis of which the Father is greater than the Son. So the Father is the *source* and *form* with respect to goodness (Mk 10.18), divinity (Jn 1.1-2, Jn 17.3), immortality (1 Tim 6.16), light (1 Jn 1.5), etc.<sup>278</sup> The Father is essentially these perfections. The Son only possesses these perfections derivatively, in virtue of his participation in the Father. As a result, the absolute Patrological titles give a precise sense of how the Father is greater than the Son (Jn 14.28).

## B. Absolute Sonship Titles

In the second place, we have a group of perfections that occupies probably the most complex place in Origen’s thought. As Orbe has speculated, for Origen this group of perfections is likely contained only *potentially* in the Father apart from the Son, and only *actually* in the subsistent existent Son.<sup>279</sup> Consequently, the Father possesses this group of perfections *in the Son* – the Son is the Father’s perfections subsisting with respect to this group. This is why I have called this group ‘absolute Sonship titles’. The Father’s relation with this group is complex and somewhat undeveloped by Origen. However, for my purposes, all that is needed is to show that Son’s role with respect to the absolute Sonship titles is analogous to Father’s role with respect to the absolute Patrological titles: as their source and form.<sup>280</sup> Origen usually expresses this point linguistically by the use of the Greek definite article. Moreover, Origen also says that the Son

<sup>277</sup> Origen has in mind the mention of ‘gods’ in Ps 50.1 (LXX): ‘The God of gods, the Lord has spoken...’

<sup>278</sup> Origen is not systematic when it comes to the description of the Son’s possession of the absolute patrological titles. Sometimes, as in the case of divinity, he speaks of the Son participating in the Father. Other times, as in the case of goodness, he speaks of the Son as the image of the Father (*ComMt* XV.10; *ComJn* XIII.234). What is clear, however, is that vis-à-vis the absolute patrological titles, the Son’s possession of these qualities are derived from the source, namely, the Father himself.

<sup>279</sup> “otras, solo virtualmente (tanquam in causa) contenidas en la substancia del Padre.” Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:442.

<sup>280</sup> See *ComJn* I.104-5, II.20.

possesses this group of perfections absolutely as supposed to relatively (with respect to creatures). The classical examples of this group are σοφία, λόγος and ἀλήθεια but there are many others. The absolute Sonship titles therefore clarify further the sense in which the Father and the Son are distinct: whereas the Father does not possess this group of perfections in his essence – but in the Son – the Son is the source and form of these perfections.

### **The distinction between Christ's absolute Sonship and relative soteriological titles**

We begin with a key distinction in Origen's theory of Christological titles. According to Origen, Scripture attributes many titles to the Christ, the Son of God, who is identified by John in his Gospel as the Logos. These Scripture titles do not all possess equal significance. It is necessary to make a distinction between two kinds of attributions.<sup>281</sup> Titles which indicate an essential aspect of who Christ is are attributed to him absolutely or in an unqualified manner (ἀπλῶς). Titles which belong to Christ only with respect to his role in the salvation of fallen souls are attributed to Christ economically ('for us' – ἡμῖν), or in a qualified manner. For Origen, these two are not either/or categories. It is possible for a title to be attributed to Christ both absolutely and economically. Methodologically, Origen does not provide a straightforward way to determine the nature of attribution for each Christological title. Rather, he typically investigates all the data provided in Scripture and then provides his conclusion for each title. His investigations unveil many possibilities: some titles are attributed to Christ both absolutely and economically; others are attributed to Christ only economically.<sup>282</sup> Some perhaps are attributed only to Christ and either to no other, or to a few others only. This ambiguity notwithstanding, in the *Commentary on John*, we find at least two distinct groups of Christological titles whose significance is clear. On the one hand, some Scriptural titles should be regarded as attributed to Christ both absolutely and economically. In this group we find wisdom, Logos, power, justice, and truth. This first group of titles belong to Christ absolutely in the sense that they indicate something about who Christ is independently of the economy. But this group also indicates that Christ is the source of these attributes found in other created beings and so he holds these titles also 'for us'. On the other hand, some Scriptural titles should be regarded as attributed to Christ only economically and as such, they are assumed by Christ only for the purpose of the economy. This second group includes titles such as 'firstborn of the dead', 'shepherd', 'door', 'way', 'life',

<sup>281</sup> The most detailed discussion of this distinction is found in *ComJn* I.247-251, II.125-126.

<sup>282</sup> 'We must know, however, that the Savior has some things not for himself, but for others, and that he has some things for himself and for others. And we must inquire if he has some things for himself and for no one else (χρῆ μέντοι γε εἶδιναι ὅτι τινὰ ὁ σωτὴρ οὐχ αὐτῷ ἐστὶν ἀλλ' ἐτέροις, τινὰ δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐτέροις. ζητητέον δὲ εἴ τινὰ ἑαυτῷ καὶ οὐδενί). *ComJn* II.125.

‘light of men’, and many others.<sup>283</sup> The important point about this second group is that each title denotes a particular economic role Christ plays in relation to us. Consequently, they do not communicate to us who Christ is, but merely what benefits he bestowed upon us in the economy. For the purpose of clarity, I have separated these two groups of titles: absolute Sonship titles from the relative soteriological titles. The former refers to everything that can be attributed to the Son in an unqualified manner, thus implying that they remain characteristic of the Son’s essence apart from his role as Saviour. The latter refers to everything that is said to belong to Christ only for us – i.e. purely for the purpose of the salvific economy. Hence they do not belong to the Son’s essence at all. We shall investigate the absolute Sonship titles in this section, and the relative soteriological titles in the next.

### **Absolute Sonship titles: the divine aspects of Christ**

In a brief sentence in *ComJn* XXXII.387, Origen summarises the main absolute titles of Christ: ‘But to seek Jesus is to seek the Word, and wisdom, and justice, and truth, and the power of God, all of which Christ is.’ These five titles are attributed absolutely to Christ throughout the *Commentary on John*. Origen describes them as belonging to ‘the divine aspects in Jesus’ (τῶν ἐν τῷ Ἰησοῦ θειοτέρων).<sup>284</sup> In other words, it is with respect to Word, wisdom, justice, truth and power that Christ is most appropriately regarded as *divine* – being ascribed the incorporeal self-sameness according to what we have seen in Chapter 2. This point is most clearly expressed in his discussion of the death of Jesus Christ. According to Origen, the possibility to be killed and die cannot be ascribed to the Christ in his absolute titles. Only with respect to his humanity can Christ admit the possibility of death.<sup>285</sup> This illustrates well the point that for Origen, the absolute titles of Christ signify his divinity as self-same and perfect.

The absolute titles, however, are not attributed only to Christ, but also to other created beings. The five titles mentioned in *ComJn* XXXII.387 are also attributed to Christ ‘for us’. Christ serves as the source and form of perfections, whereas creatures obtain these perfections only through participating in Christ. With respect to the five absolute Sonship titles, we find a hierarchical participatory structure present also in the absolute Patrological titles. Instead of the Father, the Son is truly the single source and absolute standard vis-à-vis the absolute Sonship

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<sup>283</sup> See *ComJn* I.120-124.

<sup>284</sup> *ComJn* XXXII.322.

<sup>285</sup> See also *ComJn* XXVIII.157-170. *ComJn* XXVIII.159: ‘And since he who dies is a man, but the truth, and wisdom, and peace, and justice, and him of whom it is written, “The Word was God,” were not man, the Word which was God, and the truth, and wisdom, and justice did not die, for the Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation does not admit of death.’

titles. Consequently, all created things can be attributed these titles only if they truly participate in Christ. From this participatory structure, there is a sense that with respect to his absolute titles, Christ relates to the rest of creation in an analogous manner to how the Father relates to him.<sup>286</sup> Just as the Father is the source of Christ's divinity, so Christ is the source of wisdom, reason, power, justice and truth for the rest of Creation. We shall now turn to specific examples to illustrate this point.

We begin with wisdom, where Christ serves as source in two senses.<sup>287</sup> First, it is as wisdom that Christ is said to be the source of all creaturely existence – in other words, as creator. According to Origen, all things were created because of the 'creation' of wisdom in Prov 8.22. Further, in Ps 103.24 (LXX), we read that 'God created all things in wisdom'. Joining Prov 8.22 with Ps 103.24 (LXX), Origen concludes that it is because of the creation of wisdom that all created things could exist, 'since it has a share in the divine wisdom according to which it has been created'.<sup>288</sup> So creatures exist because they participate in wisdom, and wisdom serves as the source of their existence. There is a further sense in which wisdom serves as a source. Creatures are said to be 'wise' because they participate in Christ, the fullness of wisdom. While each wise person receives wisdom from Christ according to their capacity for wisdom, nevertheless all receive wisdom through participation in Christ.<sup>289</sup> Thus for Origen, the absolute Sonship title 'wisdom' expresses the double fact that (a) all things exist by participating in Christ as wisdom, (b) all wise beings are said to be wise only by participating in Christ.

Origen's discussion of wisdom invokes the participatory structure familiar to his discussion of divinity, but he does not refer explicitly to the language of *source* and *archetype*, which is found in his discussion of Christ's second absolute title, 'Word'.<sup>290</sup> For Origen, just as the God (or the true God) relates to every other 'god' as the archetype, in the same way the Word of God relates to the reason in every other rational being as the archetype. He writes:

For as the Father is very God and true God in relation to the image and images of the image (wherefore also men are said to be "according to the image," not "images"), so is the very Word in relation to the reason in each one. For both hold

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<sup>286</sup> On this point, *ComMt* XV.10 is illuminating. See also Origen's discussion of the formal causation in *ComJn* I.104-5 where he illuminates on this analogy based on the language of 'image'.

<sup>287</sup> *ComJn* I.243-6.

<sup>288</sup> *ComJn* I.244.

<sup>289</sup> *ComJn* I.246.

<sup>290</sup> *ComJn* II.21-31.

the place of a source (ἀμφοτέρω γὰρ πηγῆς ἔχει χώραν); the Father, that of divinity, the Son, that of reason.<sup>291</sup>

As Word, Christ ‘holds the place of a source’. This language automatically invokes the participatory structure we have seen in Origen’s discussion of wisdom. Every rational creature possesses reason only insofar as they participate in the source of reason, Christ as Word. Once again, each receives reason from Christ according to their capacity. In first place are the prophets to whom the Word has ‘come to be’ participate in the ‘Word in the beginning’ – the Word ‘with God’ and ‘God the Word’.<sup>292</sup> The prophets truly possess reason, since they have truly grasped the Word in himself. In second place are believers who participate in the ‘Word made flesh’, those who know nothing ‘except Jesus Christ and him crucified’. On Origen’s reading, believers have mistakenly presupposed that ‘the Word which became flesh was the totality of the Word, who know Christ only according to the flesh’. Presumably, these are those who only knew the ‘letter’ and not the ‘spirit’ of Scripture. In third place are those who follow the schools of Greek philosophy, who devoted themselves to ‘words’ (*logoi*) which participate in some way in ‘the Word’, supposing that these ‘words’ transcend every word. Finally, there are those who believed in words (*logoi*) that do not participate in ‘the Word’ in any way at all, but are altogether corrupt and godless. Origen describes them as those who ‘do away with providence which is self-evident and more or less perceptible to the senses, and which approve some other goal than the good.’<sup>293</sup> For Origen, this scheme has shown how Christ is ‘the Word’ in an analogous manner to how the Father is ‘the God’: just as the Father is the single source of divinity from which all other gods receive their divinity, so Christ as the Word serves as the single source of reason from which all reasons in rational creatures are derived.<sup>294</sup>

The participatory structure we have seen with respect to wisdom and Word is also found in Origen’s discussion of Christ as ‘truth’.<sup>295</sup> The *aporia* that forms the context of his discussion concerns the consistency between Jn 1.17 and Jn 14.6: Is there a contradiction to say that Jesus Christ is the truth himself, and that truth ‘came through Jesus Christ’? Origen’s solution turns to the same participatory structure we have seen in the case of ‘Word’:

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<sup>291</sup> *ComJn* II.20.

<sup>292</sup> *ComJn* II.28-31.

<sup>293</sup> This is a common charge made by Origen against the Epicureans and even Aristotelians. See *CCels.* III.75.

<sup>294</sup> *ComJn* II.32-3.

<sup>295</sup> *ComJn* VI.37-9.

For one does not himself come into existence through himself. We must understand, however, that the ultimate truth itself (ἡ ἀντοαλήθεια ἡ οὐσιώδης) and, if I may put it this way, the archetype of the truth in rational souls (πρωτότυπος τῆς ἐν ταῖς λογικαῖς ψυχῇς ἀληθείας), from which images of that truth, as it were, have been impressed on those who understand the truth, did not come through Jesus Christ nor through anyone at all, but came through God. Just as the Word which was in the beginning with God did not come through someone, and wisdom, which “God created as the beginning of his ways,” (Prov 8.22) did not come through someone, so neither did the truth come through someone.<sup>296</sup>

Here, Origen differentiates between the archetype of the truth – Christ himself in Jn 14.6 – and truths based on the archetype (as its images). The former did not come through Christ since ‘one does not himself come into existence through himself.’ Rather, it came through God. Truth, in much the same way as how we should consider Word and Wisdom, came from God and not through someone else. The latter, however, came through Christ because it is on the basis of the truth that many truths – the truths of men – came forth. Further, to be ‘in the truth’ means to participate in Christ. Scripture states that the truth is not in the devil, not because he does not hold any true opinion at all but because he does not participate in the truth. For the ‘truth’ to be in someone means participating in the one who said ‘I am the truth’ (Jn 14.6).

This participatory structure extends to the other two absolute titles, namely, justice and power. On the one hand, 1 Cor 1.30 and Ps 10.7 (LXX) for Origen indicates that the ultimate (archetype) justice is Christ. The justice of each person is ‘formed from that justice, so that many justices come into existence in those who are saved’ (ἀπ’ ἐκείνης δὲ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἡ ἐν ἐκάστῳ δικαιοσύνη τυποῖται, ὥς γίνεσθαι ἐν τοῖς σωζομένοις πολλὰς δικαιοσύνας).<sup>297</sup> On the other hand, Phil 4.13 suggests that Paul derives his power from Christ Jesus who is the power of God (1 Cor 1.24).<sup>298</sup> Consequently, all those who are said to possess power derive their power from participating in the archetype and source of power, Christ himself.

### One and single as source

Before we turn to the next group of titles, one final implication of absolute Sonship titles is worth highlighting. As we have seen, with respect to absolute Sonship titles, Christ stands as the

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<sup>296</sup> *ComJn* VI.38.

<sup>297</sup> *ComJn* VI.40.

<sup>298</sup> *ComJn* I.241-242.

archetype and source. This implies that there is a sense in which Christ is analogous to the Father as *purely one*. The Father is one and simple because he is the source and archetype of everything that he is (e.g. goodness, divinity, etc.). Similarly, with respect to absolute titles, the Son is one with respect to all that he is absolutely (wisdom, word, justice, etc.). Origen does not articulate the oneness of the Son with respect to all five of his absolute titles but from what he does say about some of the titles as well as his constant grouping of the absolute titles, it is clear that oneness as source and archetype extends to all five of the absolute titles.

In *ComJn* II.37-41, Origen attempts to explain why the prologue of John Gospel speaks of ‘the Word’, and not ‘the Word *of God*’. For Origen, this is not an accident, but indicates the fact there is only one Word – the Son as the single source and archetype of reason. According to Origen, if it were written in Jn 1.1 ‘in the beginning was the Word *of God*’, this would indicate that there are many words: Word of God, word of men, word of angels, etc. In other words, specifying the Word as the Word of God would have proposed that Jesus Christ is one word amongst many other words. However, for Origen, this is absurd because it would lead to the postulate that there are several things that properly possess the title ‘Word’ (i.e. as the source of reason). For Origen, there is only one proper standard of reason because the truth is one. No one would dare to argue, for instance, that the truth of God is one thing and the truth of angels another. As we have seen, Origen differentiates the truth of God and truths of men. The truth as archetype and source of truths is one and not many. In Origen’s view, whoever stands ‘in the truth’ (e.g. in the archetype of truth) is ‘single and simple’, whereas whoever stands outside the truth is ‘complex and manifold’.<sup>299</sup> Now if the truth is one, he argues, it is absurd to think that there can be many words that can be identified as *the* Word, or indeed many wisdoms or justices that are identified as *the* Wisdom and *the* Justice. Origen gives a particularly rich articulation of this point:

Now if truth is one, it is clear that its elaboration and demonstration, which is wisdom, would reasonably be thought of as one, since everything considered wisdom would not be properly be called wisdom if it did not possess the truth. And it truth is

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<sup>299</sup> ‘But I wonder whether to have stood in the truth is something single and simple, and not to have stood in it is something complex and manifold (ἀλλ’ ἐφίστημι μήποτε ἐν μὲν τι καὶ μονοειδὲς ἐστὶν τὸ ἐστηκέναι ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ. ποικίλον δέ τι καὶ πολύτροπον τὸ μὴ ἐστηκέναι ἐν αὐτῇ).’ *ComJn* XX.239.



one and wisdom is one, the Word also, who announces the truth and wisdom simply and openly to those capable of apprehending it, would be one.<sup>300</sup>

Hence for Origen, the standard (the archetype and source) for truth, wisdom and Word is one. Put it differently, that which can be attributed the Greek article must be one and not many. This last point reinforces what we have seen in this section: the Son's relation to his absolute Sonship titles mirrors exactly the Father's relation to his absolute Patrological titles.

### C. Relative soteriological Titles

Finally, the third group of terms are best called relative soteriological titles which I have referred to above as the titles the Son possesses purely 'for us'. According to Origen, this group belongs exclusively to the Son in his role as Saviour. Origen contemplates whether this group will remain applicable to the Son if the soteriological purpose of the titles is made redundant. This is because soteriological titles are understood by Origen as attributed to the Son purely 'for us' – in other words, in a purely *relative* manner. Hence the soteriological titles do not belong to the Son's essence, but they are perhaps the Son's contingent properties. It is clear that the Father does not possess any of the titles in this group at all. As we shall see, the soteriological titles will provide a further differentiation between the Father and the Son that is distinctively anti-Monarchian. In Chapter 4, I have alluded to the fact that the Monarchians tend to collapse the salvific economy from a partnership between two acting subjects to an act by a single actor.<sup>301</sup> Consequently, even though the soteriological titles are contingent to the Son's essence, this group of titles clearly differentiate in an anti-Monarchian manner the economic roles between the Father and the Son: the Son's soteriological titles are not applicable to the Father.

According to Origen, Christ acquired many titles that are purely relative to his economic role because creatures, for their salvation, needed him to have them.<sup>302</sup> Christ became the 'light of men' because those who were darkened by evil need to be illuminated by him in order to return to God. He became 'the firstborn from the dead' because of men's sin and fall into corruption. Christ became a shepherd because man became like 'senseless beasts' who need someone to lead them back to God. Origen investigates over fifty or so Scriptural titles in Book I of the *Commentary on John*. For him, each title must be investigated thoroughly because it is possible to come to a false or incomplete picture of the economy if a thorough investigation of

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<sup>300</sup> *ComJn* II.40.

<sup>301</sup> See *CN* 3.2. This is also Tertullian's charge against the Monarchians throughout *Aprax*.

<sup>302</sup> *ComJn* I.120-4.

the differences between the titles is not carried out. Thus methodologically, the multiplicity<sup>303</sup> of economic titles is crucial for Origen's approach to understand the salvific economy revealed in Scripture. The multiple relative titles is only attributed to Christ 'for us' – economically – because these titles indicate a unique aspect of Christ in which he is needed in the salvific economy. Origen expresses this point in a bold and striking manner. If men had not fallen into darkness, Christ would not have become the 'light of men' since there would be no need for Christ to be a light for them.<sup>304</sup> If Adam and Eve had not sinned, and consequently led humanity into corruption and death, there would be no need for Christ to die and to descend into the Hades. As a result, he would not be properly given the title 'firstborn of the dead'.<sup>305</sup> Christ would not be a shepherd if men had not become comparable to 'senseless beasts'.<sup>306</sup> For Origen, Scripture attributes a multitude of titles to Christ purely because of the need of saving the fallen creatures. Consequently, the economic titles differ from the absolute titles in that the latter are attributed to Christ's very nature himself apart from his role in the salvific economy.

An important consequence of this difference between the economic and the absolute titles is that while the absolute titles belong to Christ absolutely<sup>307</sup> – there is no sense in which they 'came to be' in him – the economic titles do not. This distinction has significant consequences, as Origen notes that:

Once we have collected the titles of the Son, therefore, we must test which of them came into existence later, and whether they would have become so numerous if the saints had begun and continued in blessedness. For perhaps wisdom alone would remain, or word, or life, and by all means truth, but surely not also the other titles which he took in addition because of us.<sup>308</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Origen does not associate the multiplicity in Christ's economic titles with the kind of inherent imperfection we have seen in Chapter 2. Rather, the multiplicity of the relative soteriological titles is associated with the multiple needs of the fallen souls.

<sup>304</sup> *ComJn* I.120

<sup>305</sup> *ComJn* I.121

<sup>306</sup> *ComJn* I.122

<sup>307</sup> Tzamalikos argues that of all Christological titles, only "Wisdom" and "Word" are not subjected to becoming. See P. Tzamalikos, *Origen: Cosmology and Ontology of Time* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006), 37. Tzamalikos' position is based on a careful analysis of the sense in which Wisdom and Word were always (thus did not become) in God. Tzamalikos' analysis is illuminating but in my view, further analysis is needed to substantiate a further differentiation between wisdom and word from the rest of what I have called "absolute Sonship titles" (e.g. truth, justice, and power). It seems clear to me that Origen also considers these titles as free from "becoming".

<sup>308</sup> *ComJn* I.123.

Not only is it crucial to investigate whence a particular title came into existence in Christ, moreover, for Origen, it is necessary to ask the general question regarding which titles are absolute and which are economic, so that we can discern which would remain if men had not sinned.<sup>309</sup> One good example of how Origen carries out his investigation is found in his discussion of the title ‘life’.<sup>310</sup> According to Origen, it is clear that from Jn 1.4, ‘life’ came into existence in Christ. What this means is that there must be an ordering between the title ‘Word’ – which appears in Jn 1.1-3 – and ‘life’ which appears only in Jn 1.4. Observing carefully the logic of the Johannine prologue, Origen argues that if ‘life’ was equated with the ‘light of men’, then it must be the case that the ‘life that was made’ in Christ does not belong to him absolutely, but only for us.<sup>311</sup> Insofar as ‘life’ is concerned as a title, it is a purely economic title. As such, ‘life’ ‘comes into existence after the Word, being inseparable from him after it has come into existence. (...τῷ λόγῳ ἐπιγίνεται, ἀχώριστος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τὸ ἐπιγενέσθαι τυγχάνουσα)’<sup>312</sup> In general, for Origen economic titles are taken on ‘in addition’ by Christ on top of his absolute titles for the purpose of the salvific economy. These titles are thus *contingent* upon the salvific need of men and should be differentiated from the absolute titles that indicate, as we have seen, the ‘divine aspects’ of the Son. In other words, the relative titles do not belong to the Son’s essence (*ousia*), but are merely his contingent individual properties (*idiotētes*).

The multiplicity that Christ took on – the titles that are purely ‘for us’ – differentiate the Son from the Father in a significant way. For Origen, the multiplicity of economic titles captures the fact that Christ has a unique role in the economy, acting as *the* way leading the lost back to God.<sup>313</sup> This role is uniquely played by Christ and not the Father. Thus the Son’s relative title contains within it a crucial anti-Monarchian emphasis, namely, that the Son is to be distinguished from the Father with respect to his economic role, and not merely with respect to the fact that he is lesser than the Father with respect to the absolute Patrological titles (goodness, divinity, immortality, etc.).

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<sup>309</sup> It seems clear that for Origen, his intuition is that while the absolute titles would remain, the economic titles surely would not.

<sup>310</sup> *ComJn* II.112-32.

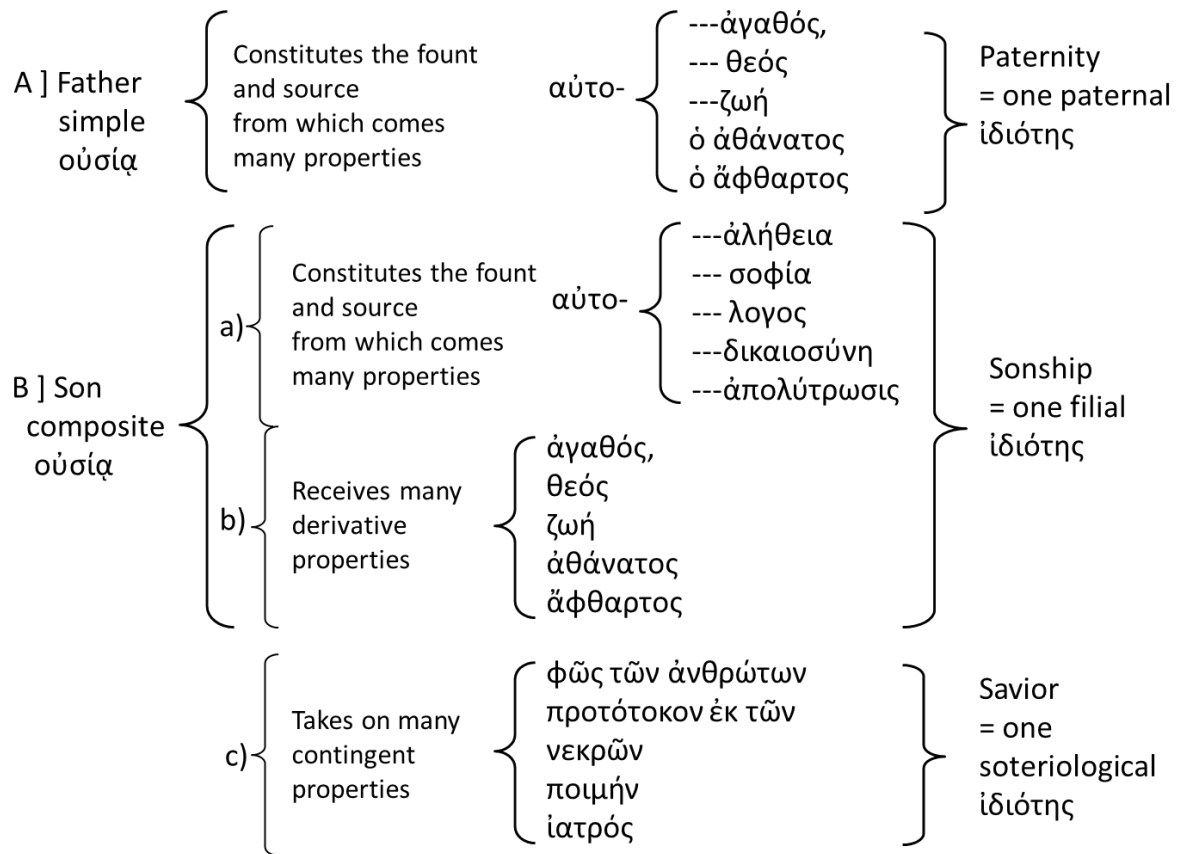
<sup>311</sup> *ComJn* II.128: ‘If indeed “life” and “light of men” are the same-for the Scripture says, “What was made in him was life, and the life was the light of men,” – and the light of men is the light of some, and not of all spiritual beings, but is the light “of me” insofar as the light “of men” is specified, he would be also the life of those men of whom he is also the light. And, insofar as he is life, the Savior would be said to be life not for himself, but for those others of whom he is also the light.’

<sup>312</sup> *ComJn* II.129.

<sup>313</sup> *ComJn* VI.103-8

#### D. The anti-Monarchian account of the Father-Son distinction

We can now summarise Origen's framework schematically, as follows<sup>314</sup>:



This diagram shows that divine simplicity could serve as a principle of differentiation between the Father and the Son in a number of different ways. First, it could be that the Father is simple in the sense that he only possesses one type of property. The Son, however, possesses multiple distinct types of properties. Consequently, he is composite in the sense that his essence (*ousia*) is characterised by a multiplicity that is substantial. Secondly, it could be that the Father is simple in the sense that the only relation he possesses with his properties is as their source and form. In this case, the Father's simplicity is uniquely attached to the sense of self-sameness implied by being *solely* source and form of something. Given that something is a source of 'X', he is always self-same with respect to 'X'. Under this construal of simplicity, the Son is both simple and complex. On the one hand, he possesses simplicity with respect to (Ba) above. However, on the

<sup>314</sup> This diagram is an expansion of the one found in Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:443. Orbe's diagram focuses mainly on a strict comparison between the Father and the Son at the level of essence (*ousia*). I have added a third category of titles which will become important in my critical engagement with Orbe's view.

other hand, with respect to (Bb) and (c), he is not source and form. Rather, the Son stands in a different kind of relation with these properties: The Son is thus not purely simple because he is not a simple source vis-à-vis all his properties. Finally, it could be that the Father is simple in the sense that he does not possess any attributes that are purely relative to the salvific economy. Relative soteriological titles violate self-sameness because they are *contingent* on creaturely actions. Consequently, the Son is composite in that he acquires many contingent soteriological titles that subject him to contingency that violates self-sameness. Simplicity in this case is associated with being free from contingency.

All of the above senses are plausible explanations of the Father-Son distinction based on simplicity. But which is the most likely explanation of *ComJn* I.119? Orbe argues for the first option: whereas in the Father there is only one ‘simple and polyvalent property’, in the Son we have a composite of several substantial properties (e.g. Ba + Bb).<sup>315</sup> Orbe’s interpretation is not implausible, but faces a problem in the interpretation of *ComJn* I.119. According to Origen, the Son is composite due to the many things (τὰ πολλά) he became for the sake of creatures. He became these things ‘as the whole creation which can be made free needs him (καθὰ χρεΐζει αὐτοῦ ἡ ἐλευθεροῦσθαι δυνάμενη πᾶσα κτίσις).’<sup>316</sup> In sketching out the Origenian account of the Father-Son distinction, Orbe did not take into account (c) above because he was considering strictly the content of Origen’s insistence that the Father and the Son are distinct κατ’ οὐσίαν. This is why he considers a strict comparison between the Father and the Son only at the level of οὐσία. As we have seen, the soteriological titles are certainly contingent to the Son’s οὐσία. However, Orbe’s concern to arrive at a strictly *ontological* characterisation<sup>317</sup> of the Father-Son distinction prevents his explanation from matching Origen’s own. In my view, Origen’s language in *ComJn* I.119 points towards the idea that he considers the Son to be composite and hence distinct from the Father’s simplicity primarily on the basis of the relative title, in other words, on the basis of the contingent *idiotētes* that he possesses. This makes sense because as we have seen, the relative titles are properties which subject the Son to contingencies and thus are said to ‘come to be’ in the Son. Subjected to such ‘becoming’ would certainly violate the self-sameness required for simplicity. Moreover, the multiplicity associated with the relative titles is genuine in that the titles are necessarily distinct from one another due to the unique salvific function represented by each. The Son genuinely took on the multitude of economic titles and ‘became many things’ due

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<sup>315</sup> Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:446.

<sup>316</sup> *ComJn* I.119.

<sup>317</sup> I.e. one that is grounded on the strict comparison between the characteristics of the Father’s οὐσία and the characteristics of the Son’s οὐσία.

to his love for the lost. Thus what rules out Christ from simplicity is his unique role in the economy as the one who took on the multiple aspects needed for the salvation of mankind.

Given that Origen never attempted a systematic analysis of various technical terms, perhaps we will never be able to reach absolute certainty regarding how he construed the contrast between simplicity and composition as a model for the Father-Son distinction. I have simply offered a plausible reading of the relevant data which makes the best sense of the Origen's thought in *ComJn* I.119.<sup>318</sup> But if my interpretation is correct, then what is truly original in Origen is that he has provided a positive theological account for the genuine multiplicity taken on by the Son. As we have seen from Part I, simplicity is commonly used as the opposite to multiplicity as a way to represent the contrast between perfect and imperfect reality. For Origen, however, the cause of the Son's simplicity is not due to imperfection in him, but rather to his unique role as a mediator between the Father and the rest of creation. This insight endows the complexity of Christ with a theologically positive origin.

In light of this, our interpretation captures how Origen's hierarchical distinction between the Father and the Son possesses a truly *anti-Monarchian* shape: the Son is to be distinguished from the Father as a composite is distinguished from a simple reality, κατ' οἰκονομίαν. The Father's economic role, however, is not one that would introduce contingency in him but rather to send his only-begotten Son to do so. In this manner, divine simplicity serves as a principle of differentiation that gives content to the anti-Monarchian emphasis of truly distinguishing the Father and the Son. Origen's anti-Monarchian polemic is difficult to pin down. As we have seen, he reports the Monarchian position in terms of *ousia*, *hypostasis*, *idiotēs*, *hypokeimenon* – in other words, almost every single important term for Trinitarian metaphysics. Apparently, for Origen, it is heretical to deny the Father-Son distinction at the level of each of these terms. While it is probably impossible to gain precision regarding Origen's understanding of these distinctions, what I have shown is that we can approach Origen's account *indirectly* through the hierarchical structure found in *ComJn* I.119. While the technical terminologies do not appear in this passage, nevertheless we are provided with a clear definition of the Father-Son distinction on the basis of

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<sup>318</sup> In fact, in my view there are a number of further plausible conjectures we can make on the basis of the data we have examined in the schema above. First, Orbe's point can be construed, not as an interpretation of how the Father's simplicity is contrasted with the Son's complexity in *ComJn* I.119, but as a reconstruction of the sense in which Origen holds that the Father and the Son are distinct *kat' ousian*. This distinction is set out such that whereas the Father's *ousia* possesses only one kind of property, the Son's *ousia* possesses two kinds. Interpreted this way, Orbe's argument is quite plausible. Further, the same argument can be used to flesh out the content of what it means for 'Fatherhood' to be a distinct *idiotēs* than 'Sonship'. For the full attempt made by Orbe, see Orbe, *Hacia* I/1, 1:440–8.

the contrast between simplicity and complexity. As I have argued, if we carefully study Origen's theory of divine titles, it is possible to gain some precision regarding Origen's positive, anti-Monarchian, understanding of the Father-Son distinction.

Further, we must note carefully the exegetical foundation underlying Origen's theory of divine titles, which in turn serves as the basis for his anti-Monarchian emphasis on the differentiation between the Father and Son. *ComJn* I.119 indeed reveals that Origen's Father-Son distinction bears close similarities to the hierarchical ordering of the first principles in the philosophy of his time. However, the way Origen arrives at the hierarchical structure is primarily through his close reading of Scripture. What makes Origen's framework unique is that in his mind, it is ultimately grounded on the attempt to see the multifarious testimonies of the Father-Son relation as a unifying whole. Origen's anti-Monarchian use of divine simplicity as a principle of differentiation between the Father and Son thus springs from a hermeneutics that is deeply committed to the unity of Scripture. Like his anti-Monarchian predecessors, Origen's anti-Monarchian theology is also primarily exegetical in character.

#### MONOTHEISM AND THE MONARCHIAN OBJECTION

I have argued that Origen's 'hierarchical' structure of the Father-Son relation, implemented via divine simplicity, serves an anti-Monarchian purpose. To conclude, one final piece of evidence will lend further weight to my thesis. As I have argued, Origen lays down a formalised scheme for the hierarchical Father-Son relation based on the use of the article in the Johannine prologue.<sup>319</sup> What I wish to highlight now is that the section in the *Commentary on John* where he develops this scheme – II.12-20 – clearly possesses an anti-Monarchian context. In this section, Origen explicitly addresses the Monarchians twice. First, as we have seen, in *ComJn* II.16 Origen criticises the two versions of Monarchianism (modalism and adoptionism). In the next paragraph, Origen begins by 'Λεκτέον γὰρ αὐτοῖς...' and then immediately turns to develop the formalised scheme between 'the God' and 'God' on the basis of Jn 17.3. This phrase suggests that Origen develops his hierarchical scheme as a response to Monarchian theology. Second, having set out his scheme, in *ComJn* II.19 Origen explicitly addresses an objection from the Monarchians: does the differentiation between 'true God' and 'God' compromise monotheism?<sup>320</sup> This point arises because Origen's scheme not only differentiates between the Father and Son. He actually envisages a more general differentiation between 'The God' and everything else that Scripture

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<sup>319</sup> *ComJn* II.12-20.

<sup>320</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 3, monotheism is the central concern for the Monarchians.

calls ‘gods’, including the Son.<sup>321</sup> This opens up Origen’s scheme to the objection of polytheism. Does the differentiation between ‘The God’ and ‘God’ – thus implicitly affirming the appropriateness of applying the title to more than one being – lead to the degradation of the term ‘God’?

Origen’s response is to postulate an exegetical case for the existence of a hierarchy of divinity. According to Origen, the exegetical starting point for a hierarchy of divinity is Ps 49.1 (LXX) and Ps 135.2 (LXX) in which we find the phrase ‘The God of gods’. For Origen, this phrase implies that Scripture teaches the existence of other gods besides ‘The God’ and the Son of God. Other gods must exist in order for ‘The God’ to be the God of something existent. Further, we learn in Mt 22.32 that ‘he is not God of the dead, but of the living.’ Origen reads this verse as indicating that ‘the gods’, of whom ‘The God’ is god, are *living* beings. Last, but not least, the Apostle Paul seems to acknowledge the existent of these ‘gods’ in 1 Cor. 8.5 by saying that ‘just as there are many gods’. This network of verses led Origen to postulate the existence of ‘the gods’ as a third order (below ‘The God’ and the Son) in the hierarchy of divinity.

Moreover, Origen seems to accept that ‘the gods’ refers to the heavenly bodies – the sun, moon, and stars, etc. In *ComJn* II.25, Origen argues from Deut 4.19-20 that when God ‘assigned to all the nations’ the host of heavens as their gods, he did so on the one hand to indicate that the Israelites should worship the greater God, namely, ‘The God’ himself. On the other hand, however, God assigned the heavenly bodies for the nations to worship because according to Origen, this is still better than for them to worship idols made by the hands of men. For Origen, the sense in which the heavenly bodies are ‘more divine’ than idols made by men justifies the application of ‘God’ to them as the third order in the hierarchy of divinity.

So in Origen’s mind, apart from God the Father, all that are called ‘God’ in Scripture draw their divinity from the Father as their source. The Son, who is God in virtue of being ‘with God’ in Jn 1.2, is the first who ‘has drawn divinity into himself’ by receiving the divinity of the Father. In a similar manner, ‘the gods’ obtain their divinity through participating in the divinity of the Father. It is in the *mode of reception of divinity* where we find the main difference between the Son and ‘the gods’. The Son, on the one hand, receives his divinity by being ‘with God’ whereas ‘the gods’ are deified through the ‘ministry’ of the Son.<sup>322</sup> Moreover, in Origen’s scheme, ‘the gods’ are further divided into two orders: first, those who are gods by participating in God (through the ministry of the Word) and second, those who are ‘said to be gods, but are not gods

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<sup>321</sup> *ComJn* II.17-8.

<sup>322</sup> ‘God the Word is the minister of deity to all the other Gods’ (*ComJn* II.19)



at all'.<sup>323</sup> The last category refers to those are simply idols and the term 'God' is falsely applied to them. Thus we can summarise Origen's hierarchy of divinity by the following scheme:

### *Hierarchy of divinity*

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| i.   | God the Father = 'The God', 'true God', 'very God' (Source of Divinity)          |
|      |  |
| ii.  | God the Son: 'God' in virtue of being 'with God' in the beginning.               |
| iii. | Those who are god by participating in God through the ministry of the Son of God |
| iv.  | Those who are said to be god but are not gods at all (e.g. idols)                |

The line above represents the break between 'The God' and 'God'. Everything that is called 'God' in Scripture obtains divinity by participating in the Father. It is important to remember that the four orders listed here for Origen refer to four senses of how the noun 'God' is applied, and not four distinct groups of subjects which are properly called divine since in actual fact, only the first three groups are correctly named 'God'. In Origen's view, this hierarchy of divinity by no means leads to polytheism. Scripture indeed testifies to the many gods. But this affirmation by no means compromises monotheism because in Origen's understanding, even though there are many gods, there is only one single source of divinity, namely, the Father.<sup>324</sup> As a result, even though many are called 'God' in Scripture, there is only one 'true God'.<sup>325</sup> Hence Origen understood monotheism as entailed by the claim that there is only one true source of divinity. For Origen, this understanding of monotheism is actually more exegetically accurate because in 1 Cor. 8.5-6, Paul actually affirms that 'indeed there are many 'gods'...yet for us there is one God, the Father.' If this verse is read literally – which Origen did – then a proper affirmation of scriptural monotheism holds the existence of many gods together with the affirmation of one God. Thus according to Origen, the hierarchy of divinity does not contradict the Scriptural testimony of monotheism. Consequently the Monarchian objection is not fatal to his hierarchical understanding of divinity.

Origen's awareness of the Monarchian objection and his measured response constitutes the final piece of evidence for my thesis in this chapter. I have argued that Origen draws on divine simplicity as a principle of differentiation between the Father and the Son. This theological move results in a hierarchical structure in Origen's account of the Father-Son relation – derived

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<sup>323</sup> *ComJn* II.27.

<sup>324</sup> *ComJn* II.20-1.

<sup>325</sup> *Jn* 17.3.

from an exegetical case – which serves a specific anti-Monarchian purpose. If my reading is correct, then when read in his third century Trinitarian context, Origen’s insistence on the Father as greater than the Son has as much – if not more – to do with his anti-Monarchianism than with his ‘doctrine of subordination’ or his ‘Platonism’. Origen’s use of divine simplicity as a principle of differentiation between the Father and Son thus goes hand in hand with his anti-Monarchianism.

## CHAPTER 6

*‘For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise’* (Jn 5.20)

### Divine Simplicity as an anti-Valentinian Principle of Unity between the Father and Son

In the last chapter, we have seen that somewhat surprisingly, Origen turns to divine simplicity as an anti-Monarchian principle to differentiate the Father and the Son. In this final chapter, we turn to the more familiar theme: divine simplicity as a principle of unity between the Father and Son. In Chapter 3, we have already seen that in the ante-Nicene period, divine simplicity acquires the role of a principle of unity in the context of anti-Valentinian polemics. According to Irenaeus, divine simplicity leads to a grammar of generation that stands in opposition to the Valentinian *probolē*. For Irenaeus, generation appropriate to the simple God must satisfy some requirements.<sup>326</sup> Concerning the *manner* of generation, a simple God must not generate that which is a separated existence from himself (something emitted *efficabiliter et partiliter*). Such a mode of generation implies two further conditions: consubstantiality and co-temporaneity. In this chapter, I shall argue that divine simplicity also plays a similar role as an anti-Valentinian principle of unity in shaping Origen’s account of the Son’s generation, but with a major difference. Unlike Irenaeus, and like Tertullian, Origen is concerned that an anti-Valentinian grammar of generation must not compromise the Son’s individual subsistence. It is therefore helpful to conceive of Origen’s account of the Son’s generation as facing a similar problem as Tertullian: Is it possible to steer a *via media* between Monarchianism on the one hand, and Valentinian *probolē* on the other? My aim in this chapter is to show how Origen’s account of the Son’s generation satisfies the anti-Valentinian conditions required by simplicity while maintaining the anti-Monarchian concern for the Son’s distinct individual subsistence.

Origen’s accounts of the Son’s generation have been well examined in scholarship. Some scholars analyse them systematically around important themes.<sup>327</sup> Others tend to be centred on

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<sup>326</sup> These are specified by one side of the pairs set out in *Haer.* II.17.2.

<sup>327</sup> Henri Crouzel, *Théologie de l’image de Dieu Chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1956), 83–98 focuses on image; Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God* chapter 3, focuses on Fatherhood; The analysis that is most sensitive towards the polemical contexts surrounding Origen’s account is Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:431–52.; Orbe, *Hacia I/2*, 2:674–92. In my opinion, Orbe’s discussion however is overly concerned with the connection between Origen and Arianism.

the significance of Origen for fourth century theology.<sup>328</sup> While these approaches certainly yield great insights, they do not elaborate on the role played by the third century polemical landscape in shaping Origen's account. Unfortunately, few scholars have attempted a focused analysis of Origen's account in light of the third century polemical contexts.<sup>329</sup> Thus given this scholarly landscape, my approach in this chapter is not to present a detailed analysis of Origen's account of the Son's generation as a whole. My task is more specific. I offer a focused reading of *PArch* I.2 in light of its anti-Valentinian and anti-Monarchian contexts. Situating *PArch* I.2 in these contexts will enable us to see how certain features of Origen's understanding of the Son's generation might have developed due to polemical concerns. Consequently, we will have a more contextualised understanding of Origen's account within its third century milieu.

Unlike in Irenaeus, divine simplicity's role as an anti-Valentinian principle of unity is much less obvious in Origen. The two passages that resemble Irenaeus' anti-Valentinian polemic are found in the *Peri Archon*.<sup>330</sup> However, the reliability of these passages is questionable because it is well known that Rufinus' Latin rendering of the work is especially problematic when it comes to the Son's relation with the Father.<sup>331</sup> Given these difficulties, I shall point out briefly how I attempt to establish my thesis in this chapter. First, based on internal and external

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<sup>328</sup> Ayres, *Nicaea*, 20–30.; Williams, *Arius*, 131–48.; R.P.C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 61–70.

<sup>329</sup> Many have analysed the polemical contexts of Origen's Wisdom Christology based on Jn 1.1-2 in *ComJn*. See Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 89–103; Waers, "Wisdom Christology." However, to my knowledge, no one has attempted to make a sustained analysis of *PArch* I.2 in light of Origen's polemical contexts. This is unfortunate because it is in this chapter where we find Origen's most sustained analysis of Wis. 7-25-26. My perspective is anticipated by Logan in Alastair H.B. Logan, "Origen and Alexandrian Wisdom Christology," in *Origeniana Tertia*, ed. Richard Hanson and Henri Crouzel (Rome: Edizione dell'Ateneo, 1985), 123–29, where he writes: "The question then arises: was this all simply Origen's own theologizing on the basis of Sap 7, 25-6 regarded by him as Scripture or as complementing the more acceptable scriptural text like He 1,3, developed to answer threats from Gnostics and Modalists?" (p. 128) The second option is the possibility explored in this chapter.

<sup>330</sup> *PArch* I.2.6; IV.4.1.

<sup>331</sup> I myself find Tzamalikos' argument concerning Rufinus' lack of understanding concerning Origen's use of temporal language with respect to the Son persuasive. See Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 9–18; Some further evidence of Rufinus' lack of reliability when it comes to the Son's generation is discussed in R.P.C. Hanson, "Did Origen Teach That the Son Is Ek Tēs Ousias of the Father," in *Origeniana Quarta*, ed. Lothar Lies (Innsbruck-Wien: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1987), 201–2; and Rowan Williams, "Damnosa Haereditas: Pamphilus' Apology and the Reputation of Origen," in *Logos: Festschrift Für Luise Abramowski Zum 8. Juli 1993*, ed. H.L. Brennecke, E.L. Grasmück, and C. Marksches (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1993), 164–66 In my view, the Latin text definitely fails to preserve key aspects of the Father-Son relation in the original. However, as I shall argue throughout this chapter, the points upon which my thesis rests are not as severely affected by Rufinus' text as some might think.

evidence, I argue that Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism are indeed the relevant polemical contexts to *PArch* I.2. On the one hand, I highlight that Origen explicitly rejects Valentinian *probolē* based on simplicity in the *PArch*. While Rufinus is not always reliable on the Son's generation, there is no reason to doubt the explicit anti-Valentinian polemic in the translation as authentic. Consequently, we should expect Irenaeus' considerations about Valentinian *probolē* to be relevant in Origen's account of the Son's generation in *PArch* I.2. On the other hand, I suggest that Origen's anti-Monarchian concern must also be in the background of *PArch* I.2. We know Origen was concerned with the Monarchian account of the procession of the Word in his Alexandrian period.<sup>332</sup> Further, Origen expresses an explicit anti-Monarchian concern in *PArch* I.2.2. Once again, while Rufinus might be unreliable on other details in this chapter, I see no reason to doubt the authenticity of the explicit anti-Monarchian polemic presented therein. Having established the polemical context, in the second part I turn to show that Origen's account of the Son's generation in *PArch* I.2 is committed to satisfying the requirements of divine simplicity, namely, what I previously call the two principles of unity in Irenaeus. However, Origen's implementation of these principles is considerably more complex than in Irenaeus. I argue that if we look closely at how Origen formulates his problematic in *PArch* I.2.4, it reveals that *PArch* I.2.5-13 is an attempt to maintain the anti-Valentinian principles of unity alongside the anti-Monarchian emphasis on the Son's individual subsistence. Consequently, divine simplicity's function as an anti-Valentinian principle of unity must be situated within Origen's attempt to maintain a *via media* between Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism, rather than simply as part of an one dimensional polemic against Valentinian *probolē* (as in Irenaeus).

#### THE POLEMICAL CONTEXT SURROUNDING ORIGEN'S ACCOUNT OF THE SON'S GENERATION IN *PERI ARCHON*

It is difficult to assess the value of *PArch* I.2 for understanding Origen's theology. On the one hand, it promises a window into Origen's account of the Father-Son relation. *PArch* I.2 presents Origen's most structured discussion on Col 1.15, Heb 1.3 and Wis 7.25-26 – three key scriptural texts in his understanding of the Son. This is especially true regarding Origen's exegesis of Wis. 7.25-26 where outside *PArch* I.2 we find little analysis in the remaining of the Origenian corpus. While *ComJn* provides a much greater account of Origen's theory of *epinoia* contained in *PArch* I.2.1-4, *PArch* I.2.5-13 remains a unique source of Origen's account of the Father-Son relation, especially with respect to the Son's generation. Yet, on the other hand, Rufinus' Latin translation

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<sup>332</sup> See my discussion in the last chapter. The dating of Origen's encounter with Roman Monarchianism clearly locates it well within his Alexandrian period. See Waers, "Wisdom Christology," 96–98.

of *PArch* I.2 is generally unreliable. As Tzalamikos has highlighted, Origen's precise conception of time and its implication on the God-Logos-Creation relation are simply lost in Rufinus' Latin. Rufinus simply did not grasp the significance of Origen's language in which the tenses of verbs as well as temporal qualifiers like 'before', 'after', 'eternal', etc. must be used carefully in order to specify the God-Logos-Creation relation.<sup>333</sup> *PArch* I.2 is one of the chapters that suffer most from Rufinus' lack of comprehension of Origen's theory of time. Thus the chapter in general should be treated with suspicion because what we have is a muddled rendering of Origen's account of the Father-Son relation.

How then should we assess the usefulness of *PArch* I.2? In my view, this chapter is not useless as an original source of Origen's theology. Tzamalikos harshly concludes that we must draw on *PArch* only when an extant Greek text has witnessed to the very same ideas found in Rufinus' Latin.<sup>334</sup> The merit of this approach lies in its attention to the most reliable testimonies of Origen's teaching. However, it also leaves out *en masse* valuable insights that could be gained only from the *PArch*, for instance, regarding Origen's polemic against Valentinian *probolē*. Moreover, it is in *PArch* I.2 where we find the development of Origen's account of the Son's generation as a *via media* between Monarchianism and Valentinian *probolē*. In what follows, I suggest that there is no reason to doubt that the anti-Monarchian and anti-Valentinian polemic in *PArch* I.2 are genuine. On these themes, Rufinus' text is a reliable witness if what is found in the *PArch* agrees with what we know about these polemical contexts from elsewhere. I shall now turn to substantiate this claim.

#### A. Anti-Valentinian polemic in *PArch*

As we might expect, given Origen's conception of God as purely simple, he is concerned to purge every materialistic connotation associated with the notion of the Son's begetting by the Father. While he consistently rejects the materialistic notion of generation, he never explicitly identifies his opponents who hold this view. Sometimes, he refers to them explicitly as heretics (*haeretici*).<sup>335</sup> Other times, he simply refers to them by the generic plural 'some' or 'those'.<sup>336</sup> According to Orbe, Origen had the Valentinian notion of *prolatio*/προβολή in mind.<sup>337</sup> S.

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<sup>333</sup> Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 10–11.

<sup>334</sup> In this sense, Tzamalikos uses the *PArch* as an "ancillary" source. Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 14.

<sup>335</sup> *PArch* IV.4.1.

<sup>336</sup> *PArch* I.2.6; *ComJn* XX.157–9.

<sup>337</sup> Orbe, *Hacia* I/2, 2:674–75.

Fernández, along with C. Blanc, simply identifies Origen's target as 'Gnostics'.<sup>338</sup> In my view, it is possible to go further. According to Jerome, Origen debated a Valentinian named Candidus. Jerome provides us with a brief summary of the content of this debate:

There exists in Greek a dialogue between Origen and Candidus the defender of the heresy of Valentinians... Candidus maintains that the Son is of the substance of the Father, falling into the error of asserting a Probolē or Prolatio. On the other side, Origen, like Arius and Eunomius, refuses to admit that He is produced or born, lest God the Father should thus be divided into parts; but he says that He was a sublime and most excellent creation who came into being by the will of the Father like other creatures.<sup>339</sup>

Habetur dialogus apud Graecos Origenis et Candidi, ualentinianae haereseos defensoris...Dicit Candidus Filium de Patris esse substantia, errans in eo quod προβολήν, id est « prolotionem », adserit. E regione Origenes, iuxta Arium et Eunomium, repugnat eum uel prolatum esse uel natum, ne Deus Pater diuidatur in partes, sed dicit sublimem et excellentissimam creaturam uoluntate extitisse Patris, sicut et ceteras creaturas.

As we can see, Jerome's report is polemical as he attempts to align Origen with Arius and Eunomius. However, there is no reason to doubt that the authenticity of his report, because the content corresponds closely to the language found in *PArch* on the materialistic notion of begetting:

God the Father, since he is both invisible and inseparable from the Son, generated the Son not, as some suppose, by an act of separation from himself. For if the Son is something emitted from the Father, and if this expression signifies something resembling the offspring of animals and human beings, then both he who separated and he who is separated are of necessity bodies. For we do not say, as the heretics suppose, that a part of God's substance was changed into the Son.<sup>340</sup>

Deus pater cum et indivisibilis sit et inseparabilis a filio, non per prolotionem ab eo, ut quidam putant, generatus est filius. Si enim prolatio est filius patris, prolatio vero

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<sup>338</sup> Samuel Fernández, ed., *Orígenes. Sobre Los Principios* (Madrid: Editorial Ciudad Nueva, 2015), 185, n.41; Cécile Blanc, ed., *Origène: Commentaire Sur Saint Jean*. (Paris: Cerf, 1982), 233–34, n.4.

<sup>339</sup> *CRJf*. II.19.

<sup>340</sup> *PArch* IV.4.1. Greek text is given by Fr. 31 (Koetschau) *apud* Eusebius, *CM* I.4.

dicitur quae talem significat generationem, qualis animalium vel hominum solet esse progenies, necessario corpus est et is, qui protulit, et is, qui prolatus est. Non enim dicimus, sicut haeretici putant, partem aliquam substantiae dei in filium versam...

Περὶ πατρός, ὡς ἀδιαίρετος ὢν καὶ ἀμέριστος υἱοῦ γίνεται πατήρ, οὐ προβαλὼν αὐτόν, ὡς οἴονται τινες. εἰ γὰρ πρόβλημά ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ γέννημα ἐξ αὐτοῦ, ὅποια τὰ τῶν ζώων γεννήματα, ἀνάγκη σῶμα εἶναι τὸν προβαλόντα καὶ τὸν προβεβλημένον

There are two noteworthy similarities between Jerome's report of Origen's *Dialogue with Candidus* and Origen's discussion of the Son's generation in the *PArch*. First, Jerome reports that Origen rejects Candidus' Valentinian *probolē* on the basis of simplicity: lest God be divided into parts. This agrees with Origen's reasoning in *PArch* IV.4.1, in which he attacks those who supposed that the generation of the Son is by an act of emission from the Father (*per prolationem ab eo*/προβαλὼν αὐτόν). This passage recapitulates the point made by Origen earlier where he attacks those who 'imagine for themselves certain emanations, splitting the divine nature into parts and, so far as they can, dividing God the Father' (*qui prolationes quasdam sibi ipsi depingunt, ut divinam naturam in partes vocent et deum patrem quantum in se est dividant*).<sup>341</sup> The similarity suggests that Candidus' Valentinian notion of *probolē* is the view of generation Origen explicitly criticises in *PArch* I.2.6 and IV.4.1.<sup>342</sup> Second, Jerome reports that Origen's response to Candidus is found in the form of his teaching that the Son was a 'sublime and most excellent creation (*creaturam*)' who 'came into being by the will of the Father like other creatures (*sicut et ceteras creaturas*)'. We need not trust Jerome's polemical portrayal of Origen's doctrine here. As we have seen in the last chapter, Origen's conception of the Son is a great deal more sophisticated than the 'Arian' doctrine Jerome tries to portray. However, one detail from Jerome's report is illuminating: Origen responds to Valentinian *probolē* by conceiving the Son's generation as 'by the will of the Father' (*uoluntate...patris*). This expression matches exactly with what we find in the two places in *PArch* where we find Origen criticising materialistic notion of the Son's generation. In both passages, we find Origen teaches that the Son's generation is 'like an act of will proceeding from the mind.'<sup>343</sup> As I shall argue, we need to be cautious about the presentation of Origen's teaching on this point in Rufinus' Latin. But the match between Jerome's report and the *PArch* is no coincidence: it

<sup>341</sup> *PArch* I.2.6.

<sup>342</sup> As Orbe has noted, it is necessary to distinguish between the Valentinians' actual account of *probolē*, from the ones that were summarised and critiqued by the 'ecclesiastics'. This is because the heresiological accounts are not often accurate. See Orbe, *Hacia* I/2, 2:677.

<sup>343</sup> *PArch* I.2.6; IV.4.1.



suggests that Origen must have utilised the will as an anti-Valentinian emphasis in his account of the Son's generation.

The two similarities between Jerome's report and the *PArch* suggest Candidus as a likely background to Origen's discussion of the Son's generation in *PArch*. Chronologically, this identification is plausible because the *Dialogue with Candidus* could be dated to before Origen's departure from Alexandria (~231/2) if we identify it, as Pierre Nautin did, with the first dialogue mentioned by Origen in his letter to his friend Alexander.<sup>344</sup> If the *Dialogue with Candidus* is indeed the first work mentioned by Origen in his letter to his friend Alexander, then given the *PArch* is usually dated during the 220s<sup>345</sup> (i.e. before the end of the Alexandrian period), Candidus certainly qualifies as a plausible candidate for the anti-Valentinian context underlying Origen's account of the Son's generation in *PArch*. I am inclined to think that Origen probably did have Candidus in mind given the similarity of language between Jerome's report and *PArch* I.2.6/IV.4.1. But given our scanty information on Candidus, this remains plausible but not certain. However, what we can safely conclude from the comparison between Jerome's report and *PArch* is simply that Valentinian *probolē* forms a key polemical context surrounding Origen's reflection on the Son's generation in the *PArch*.<sup>346</sup>

One final observation from Jerome's report will strengthen our case that Origen is explicitly concerned with Valentinian *probolē* in his reflection on the Son's generation. According to Jerome, Candidus holds that the 'Son is of the substance of the Father' (*Filium de Patris esse substantia*). In his *Commentary on John*, Origen criticises a similar view when he turns to Jn 8.42b: 'I have proceeded and come from God' (Εγὼ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθον καὶ ἦκω).<sup>347</sup> Commenting on this verse, Origen discusses two different interpretations of what it means for the Son to say that he has 'proceeded' from God. Origen's preferred interpretation is that this phrase refers to the

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<sup>344</sup> Pierre Nautin, *Origène: Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977), 170 Nautin believes that the *Dialogue with Candidus* occurred before the composition of *PArch* due to the fact that *PArch* witnesses the topics discussed in the *Dialogue*.

<sup>345</sup> Nautin, *Origène*, 370–71.

<sup>346</sup> Further evidence on this is available. The language of Origen's critique of materialistic generation in *PArch* also resembles the one where Tertullian identified as 'Valentinian'. Tertullian actually identifies this view as belonging to Valentinus himself. Again, it is important to be cautious about the accuracy of the heresiological report. As many scholars have pointed out, the views of Valentinus and the Valentinians bear a complex relationship that goes far beyond that the simple reality of the followers reciting the views of the founder of a school (See Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*). Nevertheless, according to Tertullian, the Valentinian view 'secludes' (*discernit*) and 'separates' (*separat*) the projections (προβολὰς) from their originator (*ab auctore*). See *APrax*. 8. The language in Tertullian's report agrees well with one found in Origen's *PArch* I.2.6 and IV.4.1.

<sup>347</sup> *ComJn* XX.157-9.

Son's incarnation, taking on the 'form of a servant'. This is because for him, the verb ἐξ-έρχομαι has the connotation of a 'quasi-local' departure and separation.<sup>348</sup> Such a connotation can only be appropriately applied to describe the Son's incarnation where there is a sense in which he has 'proceeded from God' by coming to us. However, a different interpretation was available in his time. He writes:

Others, however, interpret the statement, 'I proceeded from God,' to mean, 'I have been begotten by God.' These must say consequently that the Son has been begotten of the Father's essence (οἷς ἀκολουθεῖ ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας φάσκειν τοῦ πατρὸς γεγεννηθῆαι τὸν υἱόν), as one might understand this also in the case of those who are pregnant, and that God is diminished and lacking, as it were, in the essence that he formerly had, when he has begotten the Son.<sup>349</sup>

According to Origen, some have interpreted the ἐξῆλθον to refer to the Son's generation from the Father as literally proceeding out of the Father's essence. Given the 'quasi-local' connotation of the verb, Origen argues that this interpretation cannot avoid the inevitable materialistic connotation of the language, which leads to the Son's generation being conceived in an analogous manner to a human offspring generated out of those who are pregnant. In the case of human generation, indeed the offspring proceeds out of the pregnant woman such that the latter is diminished due to the removal of the offspring which she formerly possessed. For Origen, the language of ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας necessarily points to a materialistic understanding of begetting.<sup>350</sup> Both the begetting and the begotten in this case must be corporeal and composite. Hence when applied to the generation of the Son of God, the language of ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας subjects the Father to division, violating the Father's simplicity. As expected, Origen rejects the interpretation immediately given his commitment to the absolute simplicity of the Father. Origen did not identify exactly those who held this interpretation of Jn 8.42b but the view he criticises is similar to the one reported by Jerome: the Son is 'of the substance of the Father' (*Filium de Patris esse substantia*).<sup>351</sup> While *ComJn* XX is less likely than *PArch* to be concerned with Candidus directly

<sup>348</sup> Orbe, *Hacia* I/2, 2:677.

<sup>349</sup> *ComJn* XX.157.

<sup>350</sup> Thus I believe Hanson is right in Hanson, "Did Origen Teach That the Son Is Ek Tēs Ousias of the Father."

<sup>351</sup> In drawing a parallel between Jerome's report and Origen's teaching in *ComJn*, I have made the assumption that the Latin *substantia* corresponds to the Greek *ousia*. It is worth noting that *substantia* could also translate *hypostasis*, as suggested by Pamphilus, *Apol.* 100, where we find the expression *ex substantia dei* in the context of discussing Origen's comment on Heb 1.3, a passage where we find *hypostasis* instead of *ousia* in the Greek. Tertullian, in *APrax* 7, also uses *substantia* to refer to that which individuates a *person* of the Trinity. So there is a possibility that *substantia* in the discussion of the Son's generation in *PArch*

given that it falls in Origen's Caesarean period,<sup>352</sup> in my view it directly targets the Valentinian position that the Son was generated out of the Father's substance.<sup>353</sup> Thus Origen's anti-Valentinian concern about the Son's generation extends beyond the *PArch* in his Alexandrian period.

To sum up, I suggest that the Valentinian *prolatio*/προβολή constitutes the most likely target of Origen's polemics against materialistic notion of generation in *PArch*. Consequently, anti-Valentinian polemic also underlies Origen's account of the Son's generation in *PArch* I.2. In this chapter, Origen thus shares with Irenaeus a similar concern that the Valentinian notion of *prolatio*/προβολή would violate the Father's absolute simplicity. Furthermore, *PArch* I.2 constitutes an attempt to sketch out a grammar of generation that will be compatible with simplicity. And as Jerome's report has indicated, the notion of the will stands prominently in Origen's anti-Valentinian grammar of generation.

#### B. Anti-Monarchian polemic in *PArch*

Before turning to Origen's own analysis of the Son's generation in *PArch* I.2, we need to sketch out a second polemical background, namely, the Monarchian account of the procession of the Word. We can be brief here because this is discussed in detail in scholarship.<sup>354</sup> As shown in the last chapter, according to Origen, the Monarchians reject various distinctions between the Father and Son. The Monarchian view seems to be accompanied by an account of the Son's

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translates *hypostasis* instead of *ousia*. But given that Origen clearly rejects the phrase ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας in *ComJn* XX in the context of the Son's generation from the Father, and given that we do not find any instances in Origen's writings rejecting an analogous phrase involving *hypostasis* instead of *ousia* in the context of generation, in my view it is safe to make the assumption that *substantia* indeed translates *ousia* in the context of Origen's anti-Valentinian polemic.

<sup>352</sup> That is, after 233/4 when Origen left Alexandria for Caesarea. For the dating of Origen's *ComJn* XIII-XXXII, see Ronald E. Heine, ed., *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John Books 13-32*. (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 4–19.

<sup>353</sup> Orbe argues that even though we do not possess any evidence that this is indeed a Valentinian interpretation of Jn 8.42b, given that Origen was engaging in a close critique of Valentinian exegesis of Jn 8.42a in *ComJn* XX.135-51, it seems that 'undoubtedly he speaks against the Valentinians'. Orbe points to a further piece of evidence in Tertullian's *APrax*. 22, where he seems to allude to the Valentinian interpretation of Jn 8.42b: 'If God were your father you would have loved me, for I came forth and have come from God' (Jn 8.42b) (howbeit they [the Father and the Son] are not separated, though he said he was come forth, as some [Valentinians?] seize upon the chance which this saying gives them).' The phrase *et tamen non separantur* suggests that Tertullian indeed has the Valentinians in mind given that he has used similar terms to describe the Valentinian views in *APrax*. 8. I think Orbe's argument is convincing in the absence of further evidence. See Orbe, *Hacia I/2*, 2:677.

<sup>354</sup> See Heine, "The Christology of Callistus" and the references therein.

generation based on an exegetical tradition with respect to Ps 45.1.<sup>355</sup> According to this account, the Son's generation is best understood by analogy with the human uttered word. Origen reports this account in *ComJn*:

It is worthwhile to consider those who disregard so many names and treat this one [Logos] as special. And again, they look for an explanation in the case of the other names, if someone brings them to their attention, but in the case of this one they believe they have a clear answer to what the Son of God is, when he is named Word. This is especially obvious since they continually use the verse, "My heart uttered a good word," as though they think the Son of God is an expression of the Father occurring in syllables (οἰόμενοι προφορὰν πατρικὴν οἶονεῖ ἐν συλλαβαῖς κειμένην εἶναι τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ). And in accordance with this view, if we inquire of them carefully, they do not give him a *hypostasis* (ὑπόστασιν αὐτῷ...οὐ διδόασιν) nor do they elucidate his essence (οὐδὲ οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ σαφηνίζουσιν). I do not yet mean that his essence is this or that, but in what manner he has essence (οὐδέπω φάμεν τοιάνδε ἢ τοιάνδε, ἀλλ' ὅπως ποτὲ οὐσίαν).<sup>356</sup>

As Heine has pointed out, the disagreement on the Logos as either substantial or insubstantial constitutes the crucial difference between anti-Monarchians like Tertullian and Origen on the one hand, and Monarchians on the other.<sup>357</sup> According to the account cited by Origen in the above passage, the Son's generation is akin to a word uttered as sound. If the model of a human uttered word is used to conceive the Son's generation, then it secures the Monarchian position that the Son does not possess individual subsistence on his own, as Tertullian has noted:

For you refuse to consider him substantive in objectivity, as being a substance which is himself (*non vis enim eum substantivum habere in re per substantiae proprietatem*), that he may be seen to be an object (*res*) and a person (*persona*), and so may be capable, inasmuch as he is another beside God, of causing there to be two, the Father and the Son, God and the Word: for what, you will say, is a word except voice (*vox*) and oral

<sup>355</sup> Ps 44.1 (LXX). According to Heine, this tradition is not restricted to the Monarchians because some 'Orthodox' Logos theologians also utilise Ps 44.1 (LXX) in their account of the Son's generation. See Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," 64–65 for the references.

<sup>356</sup> *ComJn* I.151.

<sup>357</sup> Heine, "The Christology of Callistus," 64 According to Heine, this disagreement, in turn, is based upon two different philosophical frameworks on the Logos (Middle-Platonic and Stoic respectively). Heine convincingly shows that the Monarchians follow the Stoics by treating "Logos" as a category of speech, not ontology (p. 66). The anti-Monarchians, following the Middle-Platonists, treat "Logos" as the "second God", thus endowing it independent existence (Heine, p. 67).

sound (*sonus oris*) and...smitten air intelligible in the hearing, for the rest an empty something, void and incorporeal?<sup>358</sup>

Tertullian himself also draws on Ps 45.1 but he did not consider the verse to imply the Monarchian account that the Son was generated from the Father as an ‘uttered word’. But it seems that the Monarchians find Ps 45.1 a useful exegetical basis for this account of generation. Perhaps they find support for their account of the Son as an ‘uttered word’ from the use of the strange verb ἐξηρεύατο in Ps 45.1. In *ComJn* I, Origen offers a detailed critique of the use of Ps 45 in support of the use of ‘uttered word’ as a model for the Son’s generation.<sup>359</sup> We do not find such arguments in *PArch* but a couple of similarities between the *ComJn* I and *PArch* I.2 suffice to highlight that the anti-Monarchian polemic found in the former also underlies the considerations of the Son’s generation in the latter.<sup>360</sup> First, in *ComJn* I, we find the ‘de-centering’ of ‘Logos’ as the special Christological *epinoia*.<sup>361</sup> According to Origen, the Monarchians were led to their problematic account of generation based on Ps 45.1 because they were unduly focused on ‘Logos’ as special. In response to this, Origen replaces ‘Word’ with ‘Wisdom’ as the supreme title of the Son. According to Origen, the significance of Word as a title must be understood in relation to Wisdom. Further, Origen argues that the Word is one amongst many Christological titles. Consequently, it is absurd for the Monarchians to stop with ‘Word’ alone as a special title for the Son. In *PArch* I.2.1-3, we find a partial reproduction of this anti-Monarchian ‘de-centering’ of the Word. Origen’s Christological discussion in *PArch* I.1-3 begins with Wisdom, in a manner that parallels the one found in *ComJn* I.90-124. Like in *ComJn* I.111-5, in *PArch* I.2.2-3, he elaborates on how we should understand Word as a title, namely, in relation to Wisdom. Moreover, *PArch* I.2.1-4 shows a similar concern to highlight the multiplicity of Christological titles in Scripture that must be analysed carefully. According to *PArch* I.2.1, ‘our first task is...to see what the only-begotten Son of God is, seeing he is called by many different names’. This is also what we find in

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<sup>358</sup> *APrax.* 7.

<sup>359</sup> *ComJn* I.280-8. See Ronald E. Heine, “Origen on the Christological Significance of Psalm 45 (44),” *Consensus* 23, no. 1 (1997): 21–37 for a detailed discussion, especially 28-31. ; It is well known that the first two books of Origen’s *ComJn* are largely structured by anti-Monarchian concerns. Origen’s argument against the exegesis of Ps 45 forms part of this overall anti-Monarchian argument. See Heine, “Stoic Logic as Handmaid to Exegesis and Theology in Origen’s Commentary on the Gospel of John,” 92–100.

<sup>360</sup> While I believe that Origen’s thought in this section is modified by Rufinus to the point of beyond repair, once again, I see no reason to think that these similarities are inauthentic.

<sup>361</sup> This point is convincingly argued in Waers, “Wisdom Christology” By “de-centering”, Waers refers to the fact that in *ComJn* I, Origen de-emphasises “Logos” as the pre-eminent title of Christ, and stresses Wisdom instead as the supreme title of Christ.

*ComJn* I in Origen's strategy to 'de-centre' the Word as a special title.<sup>362</sup> Hence *PArch* I.2.1-4 contains a similar anti-Monarchian polemical structure to *ComJn* I.90-292. Second, and more definitively, in *PArch* I.2, Origen expresses the anti-Monarchian concern explicitly: 'Let no one think, however, that when we give him the name 'wisdom of God' we mean anything without hypostatic existence'.<sup>363</sup> This passage indicates clearly that as in *ComJn* I.151, the Monarchian account of the Son as a word uttered by the Father lies at the back Origen's mind when he turns to elaborate on the Son's generation in *PArch* I.2. These similarities between *PArch* I.2 and *ComJn* I.90-292 suggest that Origen's anti-Monarchian concern also forms a key polemical background to *PArch* I.2.

#### ORIGEN'S *VIA MEDIA* BETWEEN VALENTINIAN ΠΡΟΒΟΛΗ AND MONARCHIANISM IN *PERI ARCHON* I.2

Given that Origen rejects Valentinian *probole* explicitly, one would expect that for the very least, he will touch upon the issues raised by Irenaeus concerning the grammar of generation required by divine simplicity.<sup>364</sup> However, given that Origen is also concerned about Monarchianism, we would also expect that he will develop an anti-Valentinian account of the Son's generation that will preserve the Son's distinct individual subsistence. In what follows, I argue that this is what we find in Origen's account of the Son's generation in *PArch* I.2. Origen's account of is concerned to maintain the same features of generation (inseparability, consubstantiality, co-temporaneity) highlighted by Irenaeus as a requirement of simplicity. But Origen's implementation of these features goes substantially beyond what we have seen in Irenaeus. This is because Origen is concerned not only with rejecting Valentinian *probole*, as in Irenaeus, but also with maintaining the anti-Monarchian affirmation of the Son's individual subsistence.

As we have seen, Origen concludes with Irenaeus that divine simplicity rules out Valentinian *probole*. If God is simple, then he cannot suffer the kind of divisions implied by Valentinian *probole*. On the other hand, Origen also rejects with Tertullian the Monarchian account of the Son's generation as an uttered word. The divine Son possesses distinct individual subsistence. Unlike Irenaeus who is content to be silent on the nature of the Son's generation,<sup>365</sup> in *PArch* I.2 Origen attempts to provide a positive account. In doing so, Origen faces the following a problem: how is it possible for construct an account of the Son's generation that (a)

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<sup>362</sup> *ComJn* I.123, 153, 266.

<sup>363</sup> *PArch* I.2.2.

<sup>364</sup> *Haer.* II.17.2.

<sup>365</sup> *Haer.* II.28.4-5.

preserves the simplicity of the Father, and (b) maintains the Son's individual existence? In *PArch* I.2.4 Origen reveals that this is indeed the problem he has in mind:

For all these titles [the Christological *epinoia*] are derived from his works and powers, and in none of them is there the least reason to understand anything corporeal, which might seem to denote either size or shape or colour. But whereas the offspring of men or of the other animals whom we see around us correspond to the seed of those by whom they were begotten, or of the mothers in whose womb they are formed and nourished, drawing from these parents whatever it is that they take and bring into the light of day when they are born, *it is impious and shocking to regard God the Father (A) in the begetting of his only-begotten Son and (B) in the Son's subsistence as being similar to any human being or other animal in the act of begetting*; but there must needs be some exceptional process, worthy of God, to which we can find no comparison whatever, not merely in things, but even in thought and imagination, such that by its aid human thought could apprehend how the unbegotten God becomes Father of the only-begotten Son.

quia hae omnes appellationes ex operibus eius ac virtutibus nominatae sunt, et in nulla harum vel levi opinione intellegi corporale aliquid potest, quod vel magnitudinem designare videatur vel habitum vel colorem. Verum quoniam hi, qui apud nos videntur hominum filii vel ceterorum animalium, semini eorum a quibus seminati sunt respondent vel earum in quarum utero formantur ac nutriuntur, habentes ex his quicquid illud est, quod in lucem hanc assumunt ac deferent processuri: infandum autem est et illicitum deum patrem in generatione unigeniti filii sui atque in subsistentia eius exaequare alicui vel hominum vel aliorum animantium generanti; sed necesse est exceptum aliquid esse et deo dignum, cuius nulla prorsus comparatio non in rebus solum sed ne in cognitione quidem vel sensu inveniri potest, ut humana cogitatio possit adprehendere quomodo ingenuus deus pater efficitur unigeniti filii.

In this passage, Origen announces programmatically the problem he is attempting to resolve in *PArch* I.2.5-13. I have italicised the key line in the above quotation, which summarises how Origen conceives the problem. In this line, (A) clearly refers to the standard polemical reading of Valentinian *probole* according to which generation is conceived in an animal-like manner. (B), however, refers to the issue possibly raised by Monarchians against the anti-Monarchian position, as we have highlighted in Tertullian: if the Son possesses his own individual subsistence, does

that lead to the Father being divided?<sup>366</sup> In other words, does the affirmation of the Son's distinct individual subsistence lead also to an animal-like generation? By rejecting this possibility, Origen is clearly aware of this potential problem. For Origen, instead of concluding with the Monarchians that the Son does not possess his own individual existence, rather what is needed is an 'exceptional process' that will account for the generation of the Son while maintaining the Son's distinct individual subsistence such that it is compatible with the Father's simplicity. Origen's problematic in *PArch* I.2.5-13 is therefore similar to the one addressed by Tertullian in *APrax.* 8, namely, to find a *via media* between Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism. Or to put it conceptually, Origen's task is to maintain an account of the Son's generation that is compatible with divine simplicity (anti-Valentinian emphasis), without compromising the Son's individual subsistence (anti-Monarchian emphasis).

In what follows, I turn to analyse Origen's solution to the problematic in *PArch* I.2.5-13 in order to demonstrate two points: (a) that the three features of generation required by simplicity (inseparability, consubstantiality<sup>367</sup>, co-temporaneity) are central concerns in *PArch* I.2.5-13, and

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<sup>366</sup> *APrax.* 8.

<sup>367</sup> 'Here, I do not wish to get into the scholarly debate on whether Origen made explicit use of the key term *homoousion* for the following reasons. By 'consubstantiality', there is no doubt that this invokes the crucial Greek term, *homoousios*. According to Pier Franco Beatrice, in its emergence in Gnostic literature, *homoousion* has three important senses: '(1) identity of substance between generating and generated; (2) identity of substance between things generated of the same substance; (3) identity of substance between the partners of a syzygy.' (Pier Franco Beatrice, "The Word 'Homoousios' from Hellenism to Christianity," *Church History* 71, no. 2 (June 2002): 249.) In chapter 3, we saw senses (1) and (2) in Irenaeus. Currently, we find no scholarly consensus as to whether Origen used the crucial term *homoousios*, as well as in what sense he had a notion of 'consubstantiality'. It is well known that Pamphilus' *Apology* preserves for us fragments of Origen's lost *Commentary on Hebrews*, which, according to Rufinus' Latin translation, made use of the term *homoousios*. Few other texts exist to provide further evidence that Origen used the term in a Trinitarian context: (1) a fragment on the Psalms (see Lampe's *Patristic Lexicon* under *homoousios*), (2) two recent fragments edited and translated by Tzamalikos (See Appendix II in P. Tzamalikos, *Anaxagoras, Origen and Neoplatonism: The Legacy of Anaxagoras to Classical and Late Antiquity*, 2 vols., *Arbeiten Zur Kirchengeschichte* 128 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).) Scholars, however, are divided as to whether our sources provide solid evidence that (1) the *homoousion* was a part of Origen's Trinitarian terminology, and (2) the *homoousion* was used in a way similar to its Nicene and post-Nicene usages. Most notably, R.P.C. Hanson rejects the Pamphilus fragments as evidence for an Origenian use of the *homoousion*, suggesting interpolations from Rufinus as a more likely explanation (R.P.C. Hanson, "Did Origen Apply the Word 'Homoousios' to the Son," in *Epektasis. Melanges Patristiques Offerts Au Cardinal Daniélou*, ed. C. Kannengiesser and J. Fontaine, vol. 49 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1975), 293–303.); whereas Mark J. Edwards defends at length the use of the *homoousion* in these fragments as genuine (M. J. Edwards, "Did Origen Apply the Word 'Homoousios' to the Son," *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998): 658–70.). See Beatrice, "The Word 'Homoousios' from Hellenism to Christianity," 251–52 for a review of the wider debate.

For the purposes of my argument, what I shall demonstrate is that Origen had a notion of consubstantiality, namely, in the sense of *equality of nature* between generating and generated (e.g. Beatrice's



(b) that Origen develops these concerns in directions unseen in Irenaeus in order to provide an account of generation that serves as a *via media* between Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism.

A. Implementing principle 1: *Tanquam a mente voluntas*

Irenaeus' first principle of continuity states that if God is simple, then he cannot generate that which is separated from him. The principle of inseparability implies that God cannot generate in the manner of human begetting or development of mental activities. These two examples point to what is required for a process of generation to preserve the simplicity of the generator: the generated must in some sense be identical with the generator. This is what Irenaeus means when he states the 'identity thesis': 'God is all Mind and all Word, and that as far as he is Mind, he is also Word, and that his Word is this Mind.'<sup>368</sup> But Irenaeus' solution will not do for Origen. If the simple could generate only that which is identical to itself, it would lead us back to Monarchianism. This is because Irenaeus' solution does not differentiate the sense in which something that possesses a *distinct* individual subsistence from something that possesses a *separate* individual existence.<sup>369</sup> For Origen, however, there is an 'exceptional process'<sup>370</sup> in which God can generate his only-begotten Son so that it does not lead to the Son as a separated existence, but ensures that the Son acquires distinct individual subsistence. What Origen is attempting is akin to what Tertullian wishes to do with his differentiation between *pars/portio* and *distinctio/divisio*, namely, to implement the following two conditions:

**Anti-Valentinian condition:** The Son must be identical to the Father *in some sense* in order to preserve the simplicity of the Father.

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(1)). In this precise sense, I suggest that there is a parallel in Origen's Trinitarian discussion of the generation of the Son with Irenaeus' discussion of generation in Book 2 of *Adversus haereses*. This parallel provides evidence for my overall claim in this chapter that divine simplicity serves as a principle of unity that shapes the 'grammar' of generation, as seen in Irenaeus' 'proto-Trinitarian' discussion first, and in a more explicitly Trinitarian discussion in Origen. Thus in my view, and for the purpose of my argument, whether Origen used Greek term *homoousios* is not as important as the fact that he had a notion of consubstantiality as equality of nature between generating and generated in his account of the Son's generation. This is because the claim that Origen had a notion of consubstantiality can be more securely established from the texts, as I shall demonstrate in this chapter, than the terminological claim that he made explicit use of the term *homoousios*.

<sup>368</sup> *Haer.* II.13.8.

<sup>369</sup> Putting it in Tertullian's terms, Irenaeus' analysis lacks the differentiation between *divisio/distinctio* and *pars/portio*.

<sup>370</sup> *PArch* I.2.4.

**Anti-Monarchian condition:** The Son must possess a distinct individual subsistence and as such must not be *totally* identical to the Father himself.

Implementing these two conditions is the task that Origen attempts to resolve in his account of the Son's generation. Such an account must maintain the two conditions in a coherent manner without leading to obvious contradictions. The 'exceptional process' Origen had in mind is aptly summed up by the phrase *tanquam a mente voluntas*: the generation of the Word is 'like the act of will from the mind'.

From the Origenian perspective, the Son's generation is best explained using the model of the will proceeding from the mind. This model satisfies the both anti-Monarchian and the anti-Valentinian condition because the divine mind operates in such a radically different way to the human mind. As we have seen, in the case of the human mind the different stages of its activity are emitted as separated existences because human mental activities suffer delay due to embodiment.<sup>371</sup> The human mind provides a poor model for accounting for the Son's generation because it violates the Father's simplicity. However, according to Origen, this is not so with the activity of the divine mind. In *PArch* I.2.6, Origen introduces the analogy of the will proceeding from the mind:

For if "all things that the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (Jn 5.19), then in this very fact that the Son does all things just as the Father does, the Father's image is reproduced in the Son, whose birth from the Father is as it were an act of his will proceeding from the mind. And on this account my own opinion is that an act of the Father's will ought to be sufficient to ensure the existence of what he wills; for in willing he uses no other means than that which is produced by the deliberations of his will. It is in this way, then that the existence of the Son also is begotten by him.

Si enim *Omnia quae facit pater, haec et filius facit similiter*, in eo quod omnia ita facit filius sicut pater, imago patris defomatur in filio, qui utique natus ex eo est velut quaedam voluntas eius ex mente procedens. Et ideo ego arbitror quod sufficere debeat voluntas patris ad subsistendum hoc, quod vult pater. Volens enim non alia via utitur, nisi quae consilio voluntas profertur. Ita ergo et filii ab eo subsistentia generator.

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<sup>371</sup> *Haer.* II.13.1-4; *PArch* I.1.6.

To probe the details of Origen's account precisely, we need to determine the precise meaning of the term *voluntas*. Does it refer to (a) the Father's very act of willing, or (b) the result/object of the Father's act of willing (e.g. what he wills)? In other words, what is proceeding from mind? We cannot entirely trust Rufinus' text here because the notion of the Son as begotten from the will of God became tainted after the fourth century controversies surrounding Arius and 'Arianism'.<sup>372</sup> Consequently, this is a point where one would expect to see the result of Rufinus' editorial hands. So we need to turn to two passages survived in the original Greek which will help us to identify the meaning of *voluntas*.

In a fragment of the *Commentary on Ephesians*, Origen comments on the phrase 'through the will of God' (Eph. 1.1). According to Origen, the use of this phrase could raise a potential objection. The preposition διὰ for Origen indicates 'what is subordinate' (τὸ ὑπηρετικόν), meaning that which stands in the second position to something else that is greater. Origen elaborates on this use of the διὰ in *ComJn* II.70-2 when he explains that Jn 1.3 ('All things were made through him') makes clear the fact that the Word is an instrumental cause of 'all things', standing in the second position to the Father who is the primary and greater cause. Hence 'all things' are made by (ὑπὸ) the Father (cause in the first position), not by the Word, but through (διὰ) the Word (cause in the second position). In light of this understanding of the preposition διὰ, Origen anticipates the puzzlement from some concerning Eph 1.1: how could the 'will of God' stand in second position to something else? The puzzlement arises presumably because the thought seems blasphemous. Did Paul then misuse the preposition? According to Origen, the first step towards resolution is to recognise that 'through God' (διὰ θεοῦ) is not the same as 'through the will of God' (διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ). The former is clearly blasphemous, subordinating God himself to something greater but the second is not obviously so. Origen suggests that it will not be unreasonable to use 'the will of God' to refer to something standing in second position. His reason is that 'what God uses is itself considered to have being'.<sup>373</sup> What Origen is arguing here is that if 'the will of God' can possess subsistence in itself (ὑπόστασιν ἔχον αὐτόν), then it is possible to refer to it as 'what is subordinate' (τὸ ὑπηρετικόν). But is it possible that the 'will of God' have subsistence in itself? Origen proposes that this is possible, if it refer specifically to Christ:

<sup>372</sup> Arius taught that the Son came into being by the Father's will, thus treating the Son as the effect of the Father's will. See Williams, *Arius*, 101-2, lines 20-30.

<sup>373</sup> εἰ δὲ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ὑπηρετικόν ἐστιν, ἡγουμένου ὄντος αὐτοῦ τοῦ χρωμένου αὐτῷ, οὐκ ἂν εἴη τοῦτο ἄλογον. (*ComEp.* Fr. 1)

And you will take note also if the phrase ‘will of God’ can be applied to Christ so that as he is “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1.24), so he may also be his ‘will’, himself having the substance of God. But if someone should think it absurd to say that the ‘Will of God’ is invested with substance, let him note if the seeming absurdity is not about the same also in the case of the ‘Power of God’, the ‘Wisdom of God’, the ‘Word of God’, ‘Truth’, ‘Resurrection’ and ‘Way’. For it seems to me to be about the same concerning all of these, insofar as they are invested with substance in the only-begotten Word.<sup>374</sup>

ἐπιστήσεις δὲ καὶ περὶ τοῦ θελήματος τοῦ θεοῦ εἰ δύναται τάσσεσθαι ἐπὶ Χριστοῦ. ἵν’ ὥσπερ ἐστὶ Θεοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεοῦ σοφία, οὕτως ἢ καὶ θέλημα αὐτοῦ, Θεοῦ ὑπόστασιν ἔχον αὐτόν. ἐὰν δέ τι ἀπεμφαῖνον φαίνεται οὐσιῶσθαι λέγειν τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλημα, ἐπιστησάτω εἰ μὴ ἡ δοκοῦσα ἀπέμφασις παραπλήσιός ἐστι καὶ ἐπὶ Δυνάμεως Θεοῦ καὶ Σοφίας Θεοῦ καὶ Λόγος Θεοῦ, καὶ Ἀληθείας καὶ Ἀναστάσεως καὶ Ὁδοῦ. Παραπλήσιος γὰρ μοι δοκεῖ τυγχάνειν περὶ πάντων τούτων, ὡς οὐσιωμένων ἐν τῷ μονογενεῖ Λόγῳ.

Origen’s argument is straightforward. If Scripture says that Christ *is* the power and wisdom of God amongst many other things, then it is not absurd to think that he *is* also the ‘will of God’. In the same way that *hypostasis* is granted to the ‘power of God’, ‘wisdom of God’ and many others titles, so it can be conceived that *hypostasis* is granted to the ‘will of God’.

The fragment on *ComEp* shows clearly that Origen conceives the Son as τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλημα. But does θέλημα refer to ‘object of an act of willing’, ‘the act of willing itself’, or ‘the result of an act of willing’? This is unclear from the fragment. So we need to turn somewhere else. In the *Commentary on John*, commenting on Jn. 4.34, Origen suggests that he also had in mind τὸ θέλειν τοῦ θεοῦ when he speaks about the Son:

For that is not the Father’s will in its entirety – I mean that which occurs extraneous to the one who wills, apart from the previously mentioned will. The complete will of the Father is done by the Son when the willing of God that occurs in the Son does that which the will of God wishes.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> *ComEp*, Fr. 1.

<sup>375</sup> *ComJn* XIII.230.

Λέγω δὲ τὸ ἔξω τοῦ θέλοντος γινόμενον χωρὶς τοῦ προειρημένου θελήματος οὐχ ὅλον  
μὲν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς. πᾶν δὲ ἐστὶν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς ὑπὸ τοῦ υἱοῦ γινόμενον  
ὅτε τὸ θέλειν τοῦ θεοῦ γινόμενον ἐν τῷ υἱῷ ποιεῖ ταῦτα ἅπερ βούλεται τοῦ πατρὸς.

In this passage, Origen differentiates two senses in which one might say that the Son does the Father's will. The Son could be doing the Father's will by performing certain extraneous deeds. For Origen, this sense is insufficient to account for the profound sense of the Son doing the will of the Father. Rather, it is better to say that the Son does the 'complete will' of the Father. The above passage sketches out what this means. According to Origen, the complete will of the Father is accomplished by the Son only when τὸ θέλειν τοῦ θεοῦ γινόμενον ἐν τῷ υἱῷ ποιεῖ ταῦτα ἅπερ βούλεται τοῦ πατρὸς. If we read this phrase carefully, τὸ θέλειν τοῦ θεοῦ γινόμενον ἐν τῷ υἱῷ is the subject of the verb ποιεῖ. This implies that τὸ θέλειν τοῦ θεοῦ γινόμενον ἐν τῷ υἱῷ refers to the Father's act of willing coming to be in the Son. In other words, what we have read in the fragment in *ComEp*, namely, that the will of God acquires hypostatic existence in the Son. The fact that it is τὸ θέλειν τοῦ θεοῦ that comes to acquire hypostatic existence in the Son here suggests that Origen primarily has the *actus mentis* in mind when he said that the Son is the 'will of God'

In both passages we have seen so far, Origen does not refer directly to the idea of the Son's generation. Further on in the same section of the *Commentary on John*, we have clues as to how the language of the Son as the will of God relates to his generation:

Perhaps this is why he [the Son] is the image of the invisible God. For indeed the will that is in him is an image of the first will, and the divinity that is in him is an image of the true divinity. But even though he is an image of the Father's goodness, he says, 'Why do you call me good?' And indeed it is this will that is the distinctive food of the Son himself, food on account of which he is what he is.<sup>376</sup>

Καὶ τάχα διὰ ταῦτα εἰκὼν ἐστὶν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου. καὶ γὰρ τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ θέλημα εἰκὼν τοῦ πρώτου θελήματος, καὶ ἡ ἐν αὐτῷ θεότης εἰκὼν τῆς ἀληθινῆς θεότητος. εἰκὼν δὲ καὶ τῆς ἀγαθότητος ὧν τοῦ πατρὸς φησι. «Τὶ με λέγεις ἀγαθόν» καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ τὸ θέλημα βρωμὰ ἐστὶν τοῦ υἱοῦ ἴδιον αὐτοῦ, δι' ὃ βρωμὰ ἔστιν ὃ ἔστιν.

In the next section, we shall address the point about the will in the Son as an image of the first will. For now, I wish to focus on the last sentence of this passage because it is here where we

<sup>376</sup> *ComJn* XIII.234 [Heine, FoC 80, slightly modified].

come a little closer to finding Origen expressing the idea of the Son's generation from the Father's will. In this passage, Origen identifies the food, on account of which the Son is who he is (δι' ὃ βρωμα ἔστιν ὃ ἔστιν), as the first will of which the Son is an image. The phrase δι' ὃ seems to suggest that the Father's will (the βρωμα) is the basis for the Son's existence. While it is unclear how Origen would put together all that we have seen, we can provide our best attempt of a hypothetical synthesis. According to Origen, the Son is the 'will of God' (τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλημα) hypostatically existing. However, it is the will of God in the sense of God's act of willing (τὸ θέλειν τοῦ Θεοῦ) that acquires hypostatic existence in the Son. Consequently, the Son's hypostatic existence is guaranteed by the Father's act of willing. Applying this synthesis back to *PArch* I.2.6, we should treat *voluntas* in this passage as referring to the *act* of willing, not the result or object of the act.<sup>377</sup> The Son is generated as the Father's own act of will proceeds from himself, a process which results in this act of will acquiring hypostatic existence.

How does *tanquam a mente voluntas* provide Origen the exception that differs radically from Valentinian animal-like generation? According to Origen, the simple Mind (the Father) acts in such a way that his act of will could acquire hypostatic existence without causing divisions in him. In this statement, we have come to the place where Origen identifies the mystery of the Son's generation, namely, why this is an 'exceptional process'. The act of God's will proceeding from the mind satisfies both the anti-Monarchian and anti-Valentinian conditions at once because the divine mind does not function in the same way as the human mind. We shall now set out Origen's argument for this point in full.

On the one hand, for Origen, God is not a mind like the human mind, as we have seen in *PArch* I.1.6: 'that simple and wholly mental existence can admit no delay or hesitation in any of its movements or operations'. In Irenaeus, we have seen how a simple Mind cannot generate that which is emitted *efficabiliter et partiliter*. Hence activities of God's mind – including his act of willing – do not result in anything that is *separated* from the mind itself. Origen writes:

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<sup>377</sup> Thus Origen is not saying here that the Son's subsistence is guaranteed by the efficacy of the divine will. If this were the case, then we have an 'Arian' doctrine where the Son's subsistence is the result or effect of the Father's will akin to how creatures were caused *ex nihilo* by the efficacy of the divine will. Rather, as Orbe insightfully summarises, Origen's point is that there is something in the simple nature of the divine mind which means that the very act of the Father's will in his mind acquires, in the specific case of the procession of the Son, a subsistent reality so real that humanly speaking, it is normally only possible in the case of *probole*. Thus the point Origen wishes to highlight is not the efficacy of the divine will in ensuring the subsistence of the Son, but rather the mystery of the act of will (*voluntas*) in a simple being where it can acquire a distinct subsistence on its own that does not divide the mind. See Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:402–4.

Rather must we suppose that as an act of will proceeds from the mind without either cutting off any part of the mind or being separated or divided from it, in some similar fashion has the Father begotten the Son<sup>378</sup>

Magis ergo sicut voluntas procedit e mente et neque partem aliquam mentis secat neque ab ea separator aut dividitur: tali quadam specie putandus est pater filium genuisse

Like Irenaeus, Origen affirms that God's mental activity, including his act of will, cannot lead to the generation of entities that divide it. The Son's generation *tanquam a mente voluntas* is unlike Valentinian *probole* because it is based on *divine* mental activities. As a result, the Son's generation *tanquam a mente voluntas* will not compromise the simplicity of the Father.

We can elaborate this anti-Valentinian point a bit further. We know that the Son's generation does not subject the Father to division because of the divine mind does not function in a similar manner to the human mind. But as Irenaeus has required, the Father's simplicity remains only if what he generates is *in some sense* identical to himself.<sup>379</sup> Given Origen's anti-Monarchian sensibility, it is not obvious how this condition could be maintained. We do not find Origen using the language of the 'identity thesis' but in *PArch* I.2.9, commenting on Wis 7.25-26, Origen provides what amounts to his closest affirmation of it. He writes:

The breath, then, or if I may so call it, the strength of all this power, so great and so immense, comes to have a subsistence of its own and although it proceeds from the power itself as will proceeding from mind, yet nevertheless the will of God comes itself to be a power of God. There comes into existence, therefore, another power, subsisting in its own proper nature, a kind of breath, as the passage of Scripture calls it, of the first and unbegotten power of God, drawing from this source whatever existence it has; and there is no time when it did not exist.

Huius ergo totius virtutis tantae et tam immensae vapor et, ut ita dixerim, vigor ipse in propria subsistentia effectus quamvis ex ipsa virtute velut voluntas ex mente procedat, tamen et ipsa voluntas dei nihilominus dei virtute efficitur. Efficitur ergo virtute altera in sua proprietate subsistens, ut ait sermo scripturae, vapor quidam primae et ingenitae virtutis dei, hoc quidem quod est inde trahens; non est autem quando non fuerit.

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<sup>378</sup> *PArch* I.2.6.

<sup>379</sup> E.g. the 'identity thesis' in Irenaeus. See my discussion in Chapter 3.

In this passage, Origen is determining the sense in which the Son is ‘a breath of the power of God’. The breath proceeds from the power (i.e. God the Father) as the will proceeds from mind. As we expect from Origen’s understanding of divine activity, he affirms here that the very strength of God’s power itself is sufficient to secure the subsistent existence of the breath, namely, the Son. So far, this is familiar to what we have seen in *PArch* I.2.6. However, what is crucial to note is the following line: *vigor ipse in propria subsistentia effectus quamvis ex ipsa virtute velut voluntas ex mente procedat, tamen et ipsa voluntas dei nihilominus dei virtute efficitur*. Unmistakably, in this sentence Origen is identifying the Son of God as the *voluntas dei* (i.e. τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ). The argument in this sentence is that the breath which proceeds from the power (i.e. the Father) in this case becomes nothing less than *another* power of God. As the next paragraph indicates, Origen is thinking of 1 Cor 1.24 where Christ is said to be a power of God. This is why Origen turns to make the case that besides being ‘the breath of the power of God’, the Son of God is a subsisting power of God in his own right – ‘a power proceeding from the power’.<sup>380</sup> Putting Origen’s motivation aside, what is remarkable about this argument is that the subject of this power in the above sentence is *ipsa voluntas dei*. In other words, there is a limited sense in which the Son is identical to the Father, namely, that he is the Father’s act of will subsisting. By identifying the hypostasised ‘breath of the power of God’ as the will of God, Origen maintains that the Son does not become a *second* will of God nor is he the effect of the will of the Father.<sup>381</sup> Rather, the only-begotten Son is himself the Father’s act of will in hypostatic existence. As a result, there is only one will of God: the Son is the *subsistent will of the Father*.

We have now seen how Origen’s account satisfies the anti-Valentinian condition. But does it fall into Monarchianism? We know that Valentinian *probole* ensures that the generated obtains *separated* existence – in Origen’s language, one might say hypostatic existence that divides the generator. But if one dispenses with *probole*, as Origen does, how is it possible that the Son possesses hypostatic existence? Here, it seems that Origen simply turns to the mystery of divine

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<sup>380</sup> *PArch* I.2.9.

<sup>381</sup> As Orbe has pointed out, it is important to clarify that Origen is not saying here that the Son’s subsistence is guaranteed by the efficacy of the divine will. If this were the case, we would have an ‘Arian’ scenario where the Son’s subsistence is the *result* or *effect* of the Father’s will akin to how creatures were caused *ex nihilo* by the efficacy of the divine will. Rather, Origen’s point is that there is something in the simple nature of the divine mind which means that the very act of the Father’s will in his mind acquires, in the specific case of the procession of the Son, a subsistent reality so real that humanly speaking, it is normally only possible in the case of *probole*. Thus the point Origen wishes to highlight is not the efficacy of the divine will in ensuring the subsistence of the Son, but rather the mystery of the act of will (*voluntas*) in a simple being where it can acquire a distinct subsistence on its own that does not divide the mind. Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:403–4.



activity which differs from human activities. For Origen, the divine will has no need for any other processes such as *probole* to ensure that what it generates possesses hypostatic existence. The very act of the divine will is sufficient to grant subsistent existence to itself.<sup>382</sup> The mystery lies in the fact that somehow, unlike in created minds, the act of the Father's will from his mind could acquire a distinct hypostatic existence on its own, as Orbe summarises:

The mystery is that a 'voluntas' in itself (humanly) that is incapable of subsisting, acquires in the divine procession of the Logos a subsistence so real (although of superior nature) as that acquired by animals under *prolatio*...In God, such a mystery cannot be missed, according to Origen, because of the singular nature of the procession, "tanquam a mente voluntas". For the Son is not born by the simple effect of the divine will, but comes as a volitional exercise (= 'voluntas') of the very Mind of God.<sup>383</sup>

On the basis of the mystery of the divine act, the model of the will proceeding from the mind guarantees the Son's hypostatic existence.<sup>384</sup> Thus for Origen, the mystery of the divine act of will provides the key for seeing how generation *tanquam a mente voluntas* satisfies the anti-Monarchian condition.

But there is one further question: does the identification of the Son as the Father's own act of will subsisting compromise the distinction between the Father and Son? In *PArch* I.2.9 it is not clear but it is made clear elsewhere. According to Origen, the sense in which the Son's will is identical to the Father's is this: 'the will of God is in the will of the Son, and the will of the Son has become indistinguishable from the will of the Father, and there are no longer two wills but one.'<sup>385</sup> If Origen in any sense affirms the 'identity thesis' at all, then he affirms it on the basis of the harmony of will between the Father and Son: 'Therefore we worship the Father of the truth and the Son who is the truth; they are two distinct existences, but one in mental unity, in agreement, and in identity of will (δύο τῇ ὑποστάσει πράγματα, ἐν δὲ τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ καὶ τῇ συμφωνίᾳ

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<sup>382</sup> *PArch* I.2.6: '...an act of the Father's will ought to be sufficient to ensure the existence of what he wills' for in willing he uses no other means than that which is produced by the deliberations of his will'; *PArch* I.2.9: 'The breath then...so great and so immense, comes to have a subsistence of its own.'

<sup>383</sup> (my translation). Orbe, *Hacia* I/1, 1:402–3.

<sup>384</sup> Barnes provides an illuminating analysis on the mechanism of divine production in Michel René Barnes, *The Power of God: Δύναμις in Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian Theology* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 115–20.

<sup>385</sup> *ComJn* XIII.228.

καὶ τῇ ταυτότητι τοῦ βουλήματος).<sup>386</sup> From this passage, it is clear that Origen does not identify the Son with the Father's will in a naïve Monarchian sense. The Son actually possesses his *own* will, which is 'an image of the first will'. So the Father's will is in principle distinct from the Son's will. However, Origen considers the Son as the Father's own will, because the Son images the Father perfectly at the level of act and willing: 'when he wills in himself what was also the Father's will, so that the will of God is in the will of the Son, and the will of the Son has become indistinguishable from the will of the Father, and there are no longer two wills but one.'<sup>387</sup> Thus the Son is identified by Origen as the Father's own will because the Son 'does the complete will of the Father'. This point provides a crucial clarification to Origen's account of the Son's generation. Consider the following hypothetical scenario: if the Son is the only-begotten who possesses subsistent existence and yet he does not do the complete will of the Father, the Son could *not* be identified as the Father's act of will subsisting.<sup>388</sup> So the identification between the Son and the Father's act of will is not a simple identification.<sup>389</sup> In light of this, when in *PArch* I.2.9 Origen proposes the Son as identical to the Father's act of will subsisting, what needs to be understood is the following. The only-begotten Son is the subsistent existence who does the complete will of the Father. It is because the Son *does* the complete will of the Father that the Son *is* the Father's act of will. This identification simply points to the correspondence between the acts of the Father and the acts of the Son. Thus the identification of the Son as the Father's will subsisting in no way compromises the Son's *distinct* hypostatic existence.

We can now summarise how the Son's generation *tanquam a mente voluntas* serves as the 'exceptional process' Origen was searching for in *PArch* I.2.4. On the one hand, the Son's

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<sup>386</sup> *CCels.* VIII.12. *ComJn* XIII.228 and *CCels.* VIII.12 highlight that Origen's account of the Son as identical to the Father's will is an *anti-Monarchian* move, suggested by the fact that Origen utilises the identical of wills as the correct meaning of the two key Monarchian texts, namely, Jn 10.30 and Jn 12.45.

<sup>387</sup> *ComJn* XIII.228.

<sup>388</sup> This is just a hypothetical consideration that would be impossible, strictly speaking, if the Father is simple. This is because the simple Father could only generate that which is perfectly one in nature with himself, as we have seen in *Haer.* II.17.2. As a result, if God did indeed generate a Son who did not do the complete will of God, then the Son once again would be a separate existence from the Father. Consequently, the generation of such a Son would divide the Father and violate his simplicity. Given the commitment to the Father's simplicity, it would be quite impossible for Origen to imagine the Father generating a Son who does not do the complete will of the Father.

<sup>389</sup> This point is crucial when we turn to Origen's understanding of the Son as image of the Father. As the image is not identical to the imaged, so the Son's will cannot be identified as the Father's will in a naïve sense. 'For indeed the will that is in him [the Son] is an image of the first will' implies that the two wills are identical in the profound sense that the Son does the complete will of the Father to the extent that his own will is identical to the Father's will. It is in this precise sense that the Son is the Father's act of will subsisting.

generation from the Father *tanquam a mente voluntas* in no way violates the Father's simplicity because unlike Valentinian *probole*, the Father's will does not generate something as a separate existence from himself. If this was the case, then there would be no single sense in which the Father and the Son were identical. However, there is one sense in which the Son is identical to the Father: the Son is the Father's act of will subsisting. In this manner, Origen's account of the Son's generation thus fully satisfies the anti-Valentinian condition. On the other hand, what is 'exceptional' about this account is that the divine act of will suffices to ensure itself hypostatic existence. Origen's account might appear *prima facie* to be inconsistent with his anti-Monarchianism. However, this is not necessary because according to Origen, the Son is identical to the Father in virtue of their harmony of will which is perfectly compatible with the anti-Monarchian emphasis of the Son as a distinct *hypostasis*. Hence this identification does not entail the Monarchian thesis that the Son is the Father. Taken together, the language of *tanquam a mente voluntas* provides the solution to the problematic stated in *PArch* I.2.4, namely, to provide a *via media* between Valentinian *probole* and Monarchianism.

#### B. Implementing principle 2a: the Son as Image and Mirror

Origen's attempt to implement the first principle of unity leads to considerations well beyond what we have seen in Irenaeus. This is due to the extra anti-Monarchian concern present in Origen's account. However, as we shall now turn to demonstrate, Origen's account of generation *tanquam a mente voluntas* is equally committed to the two implications found in Irenaeus' account of generation *tanquam a sole radius*: consubstantiality and co-temporaneity.

According to Irenaeus, a simple God can only generate that which is 'of one form, in every way equal and similar' with himself.<sup>390</sup> This implies that a mode of generation compatible with simplicity could only allow difference between generator and generated by generation (*generatione*) or by size (*magnitudine*).<sup>391</sup> The first allows one to distinguish between the status as source (e.g. sun) and as derivative (e.g. rays from sun). The second allows one to distinguish two of the same kind (light) where one is greater (e.g. the brightness of the sun) and one is lesser (e.g. the brightness of the rays). The key point is that despite these differences, the generator and the generated are *one in nature*. Just as rays and the sun are both lights, so the generator and the generated must share the same nature. This is the first requirement in what I have called Irenaeus'

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<sup>390</sup> *Haer.* II.17.2.

<sup>391</sup> *Haer.* II.17.4.

second principle of unity. In Origen, we find a similar account of consubstantiality,<sup>392</sup> albeit implemented using a different language based on Col 1.15 ('the image of the invisible God'), Heb 1.3 ('the express image of his substance') and Wis 7.25-26 ('an unspotted mirror of the working or power of God and an image of his goodness'). Origen's exegesis of these passages captures how he attempts to maintain consubstantiality alongside the anti-Monarchian emphasis.

According to Origen, the Son's consubstantiality with the Father is best expressed by the notion of *image*. Drawing on the language of Col. 1.15, Origen suggests that there are two senses in which something is an image of something else. In a material sense, a thing is called an image of an object if it is a realisation of the object in material form (e.g. wood, stone, etc.). However, in an immaterial sense, a thing is called an image if it reproduces faithfully every aspect of what is imaged. The second sense does not require a materialistic understanding of imaging because it is grounded on the concept of *faithful reproduction*. For example, in Gen 5.3, it is written 'and Adam begat Seth after his own image and after his own kind.' According to our text, Origen argues that the sense of 'image' indicates the preservation of the unity of nature between a father and a son. As a result, the immaterial sense of 'imaging' supplies a useful language for accounting how the Son is consubstantial with the Father. It is probable that the phrase *Quae imago etiam naturae ac substantiae patris et filii continent unitatem* in *PArch* I.2.6 belongs to Rufinus, and not Origen. However, we can bypass this problem because the Origen's point will become clear if we read *PArch* I.2.6 in conjunction with *ComJn* XIII.234.

In *PArch* I.2.6, Origen reads Col 1.15 together with Jn 5.19 to argue that the Son is a perfect image of the Father on the level of *act*. The 'image' language applies to the Son because he is a faithful reproduction of every aspect of the Father's *act*. This passage shows that for Origen, the language of image is intimately connected to the language of will. The Son is the perfect image of the Father because he does the complete will of the Father. So the kind of unity between the Father and Son is found primarily at the level of act. This understanding of image is verified in *ComJn* XIII.234, where Origen states that the relation between the Son's will with the Father's will is like the relation between an image and what is imaged.<sup>393</sup> What Origen had in mind is the same point: the Son does the complete will of the Father. Given the Son's will is not naïvely identified with the Father's will, the two wills nevertheless are one because of the perfect

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<sup>392</sup> ~~By 'consubstantiality', I simply refer to some sense of unity of nature, as shown in Irenaeus' discussion. Although what we explore here sheds light on the problem of whether or not Origen uses the term *homoousios*, the problem in itself is out of scope for this study.~~

<sup>393</sup> *ComJn* XIII.234,

harmony existing between them.<sup>394</sup> As a result, the Son's will relates to the Father's like a perfect image that faithfully reproduces the original. In my view, this is what Origen intends to say about the second sense of 'image' in *PArb* I.2.6. The Father and Son are 'consubstantial' in the sense found in *ComJn* XIII.234: the Son is the perfect image of the Father at the level of act and will. If I may juxtapose Origen's language with Irenaeus' terms, the Son's act and the Father's will are 'of one form, in every way equal and similar'.<sup>395</sup>

This is not the only place in Scripture where Origen finds this account of perfect consubstantiality between Father and Son. He also identifies this point in the phrase 'unspotted mirror of the energy (ἐνεργείας) or working of God' in *Wis* 7.25. Although the language of image is absent in this verse, there are number of similarities between Origen's exegesis of this phrase in *PArb* I.2.12 and his understanding of the Son as image in *PArb* I.2.6. First, Origen interprets the unity between the Son and the Father at the level of act. This is because Origen observes that the Son is called 'unspotted mirror' specifically 'of the energy or working of God'. Second, Origen turns once again to *Jn* 5.19 to clarify the meaning of the unity between the Father and the Son indicated by the phrase 'unspotted mirror of the energy or working of God'. Finally, Origen provides a similar qualification on how this phrase indicates that the Son does not possess a separate existence from the Father. This qualification is also found in the exegesis of *Col* 1.15 in *PArb* I.2.6 where he discusses the Son as 'image'. Based on these similarities, it is safe to suppose that the two accounts are closely connected. In *PArb* I.2.12, Origen turns to *Wis* 7.25. The first half recalls what we know previously from Origen's exegesis of the phrase 'the breath of the power of God' in *Wis* 7.25: Origen understands the Son as *the strength of the power of God subsisting*, which is itself a power of God according to *1 Cor* 1.24. It is the second half, beginning 'sicut ergo in speculo...', when Origen turns to the nature of the unity between the Father and the Son. According to Origen, the phrase 'unspotted mirror of the working of God' provides an analogy of how the Son is one with the Father. When the person looks into the mirror, he sees the image moving and acting in perfect accordance with how he himself moves and acts. For Origen, this imagery provides us a way to understand how the Father and Son are one:

As regards the power of his works, then, the Son is in no way whatever separate or different from the Father, nor is his work anything other than the Father's work, but there is one and the same movement, so to speak, in all they do; consequently

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<sup>394</sup> *ComJn* XIII.228.

<sup>395</sup> *Haer.* II.17.4.

the Father has called him an ‘unspotted mirror’, in order to make it understood that there is absolutely no dissimilarity between the Son and the Father.<sup>396</sup>

Quoniam ergo in nullo prorsus filius a patre virtute operum inmutatur ac differ, nec aliud est opus filii quam patris, sed unus atque idem, ut ita dicam, etiam motus in omnibus est: idcirco speculum eum immaculatum nominavit, ut per hoc nulla omnino dissimilitudo filii intellegatur ad patrem.

This passage illustrates how Origen’s understanding of the Son is motivated by the anti-Valentinian intention to implement the Irenaeian principles of unity. First, Origen maintains that the Son is not a separate existence from the Father. Second, Origen argues that in virtue of the Son as the ‘unspotted mirror’, the Son must have no dissimilarities with the Father.<sup>397</sup> Once again, Origen’s understanding of the unity between the Father and Son is given at the level of act: ‘there is one and the same movement...in all they do’. Thus the language of mirror in Wis 7.25 provides a further analogy besides image for comprehending how the Son is one with the Father at the level of act. Combining the two imageries we have seen, we could say that the Son is one with the Father as a *perfect image in the mirror*.

By now, it should be clear that Origen maintains Irenaeus’ consubstantiality condition using the language of image and mirror. We shall now turn to show how Origen’s account of the Son as image enables the kind of differentiation allowed by the consubstantiality condition: by generation and by size. In *PArch* I.2.8, commenting on how the Saviour is ‘the image of God’s subsistence’ (Heb 1.3), Origen comes up with the (in)famous metaphor of the statues. He writes:

Let us suppose, for example, that there existed a statute of so great a size as to fill the whole world, but which on account of its immensity was imperceptible to anyone, and that another statue was made similar to it in every detail, in shape of limbs and outline of features, in form and material, but not in its immense size, so that those who were unable to perceive and behold the immense one could yet be confident that they had seen it when they saw the small one, because this preserved every line of limbs and features and the very form and material with an absolutely

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<sup>396</sup> *PArch* I.2.12.

<sup>397</sup> According to Irenaeus, what is simple must generate that which is ‘of one form, in every way equal and similar’ with itself (*Haer.* II.17.2). Once again, in light of passages such as *ComJn* XIII.152-4, the language of *nulla omnino dissimilitudo* perhaps belongs to Rufinus and not to Origen. But Origen’s point is not unrecoverable, because in the line before Origen explains what he means by the unity between the Father and Son: ‘there is one and same movement...in all they do’. The unity at the level of act is clearly witnessed in Origen’s Greek writings, as I have shown.

indistinguishable similarity. It is by some such likeness as this that the Son, in emptying himself of his equality with the Father, and showing to us a way by which we may know him, becomes an ‘express image’ of God’s subsistence.<sup>398</sup>

I will not comment on the reliability of this passage or Origen’s exact position here. What I wish to highlight is simply that Origen’s understanding of ‘image’ language enables the same kind of difference one would expect from Irenaeus: by size (*magnitudine*). Of course, as Origen himself points out, it would be absurd to take the materialistic connotation of size in this metaphor literally. But Origen allows a difference by size between the Father and Son at the level of immensity, which leads to a noted difference between the two in terms of knowability/accessibility in relation to creatures. The Son is indeed lesser than the Father in the immensity of goodness, divinity, brightness, etc. so that ‘through this fact of his [the Son’s] becoming to us the brightness, we who were not able to look at the glory of pure light while it remained in the greatness of his godhead, may find a way of beholding the divine light through looking at the brightness.’<sup>399</sup> In this sense, I suggest that Origen indeed allows difference ‘by size’ between the Father and Son.

Origen also allows difference between the Father and the Son ‘by generation’. That is, he allows one to differentiate the Father as source and the Son as derived from the source. Given that the Son-Father relation is analogous to the relation between an image and what is imaged, the language of image contains within it the difference ‘by generation’. A perfect image of an object is a faithful reflection of the *actual* object itself. Hence the language of imaging inevitably suggests that the image is characterised as a *derived* reality rather than the *actual* reality of what it images. As we have seen in the last chapter, the clearest way in which this aspects of Origen’s understanding manifests itself is found in his understanding of the Father as the Good itself, and the Son as ‘the image of goodness’ (Wis 7.26). In *PArb* I.2.13, Origen provides a discussion of

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<sup>398</sup> *PArb* I.2.8.

<sup>399</sup> The Son as the accessible image of the Father who is inaccessible to creatures is a persistent theme from the rest of Origen’s Greek extant writings. The crucial passage is *ComJn* XIX.34-39. According to Origen, ‘the Father is not seen otherwise than by seeing the Son...it is impossible, however, to behold God apart from the Word.’ (XIX.35) Similarly, ‘It is impossible, however, for the God of Wisdom to be apprehended apart from the leading of Wisdom.’ (XIX.36) In other words, for Origen, the Father’s greatness is such that creatures could only approach him *through* the image and mediator, the Son. We find other similar passages in *ComJn*: The Son is the way to the Father (*ComJn* VI.103-8); one is to come after him so that we might come to the Father. (*ComJn* VI.191-2); it is through the Son that the Apostles come to see God (*ComJn* XIII.153). The exact language of immensity need not be Origenian but my point is that Origen clearly conceives of a difference between the Father and Son using the term ‘immensity’. Hence there is no reason to doubt that Rufinus’ translation preserves this Origenian point.

this point but Rufinus' translation is, in my opinion, beyond repair. Fortunately, we have a number of similar discussions in Origen's extant Greek writings. In *ComJn* II.20, he suggests that the Father – the God and true God – is the *source* of divinity in relation to the Son who is image of his divinity. In *ComJn* XIII.234, Origen calls the Son 'an image of the true divinity'. With respect to divinity, Origen allows a differentiation we have seen in the last chapter: the Father's divinity is the source, whereas the Son's divinity, the image, is derived from the Father. A similar differentiation is allowed by Origen with respect to goodness as well.<sup>400</sup> Thus it is clear that in Origen's account, differentiation between source and image is perfectly consistent with the consubstantiality between Father and Son at the level of will.

Origen's account of consubstantiality is consistent with what we might expect. Given that Origen rejects Valentinian *probolē*, we should expect that the mode of generation endorsed by Origen – *tanquam a mente voluntas* – should guarantee that (a) the generator and generated are 'of one form, in every way equal and similar',<sup>401</sup> while (b) allowing difference by generation and size. The language of image preserves both requirements clearly. What is less clear is whether Origen's use of 'image' language also provides him with a polemical edge against both Valentinianism and Monarchianism. This is not made explicit in *PArch* I.2.6 very often but it is not difficult to imagine how the language of image might provide a *via media* between the two. On the one hand, the Son as the perfect image of the Father rules out any suggestion of division in the Father-Son relation. This stands in sharp contrast with Valentinian *probolē* which introduces discontinuity between generator and generated. Origen notes this point in *PArch* I.2.6: 'Rather must we suppose that as act of will proceeds from the mind without either cutting of any part of the mind or being separated or divided from it, in some similar fashion has the Father begotten the Son, who is indeed his image; so that as the Father is invisible by nature, he has begotten an image that is also invisible.' On the other hand, the Son as perfect image of the Father clearly serves an anti-Monarchian purpose because the image is not the source itself. The image is perfectly one with the source – at the level of act and will – but the image is nevertheless distinguished from the source by generation and size. Finally, the language of image allows Origen to hold his anti-Valentinian and anti-Monarchian emphases together. This is because on Origen's understanding, image means perfect harmony in act and will. Origen's understanding of image at the level of act and will enables him to affirm that the Son could be a *distinct* individual existence without becoming a *separate* existence that is dissimilar from the Father. The Son's will (image) and the Father's will (the original) are not naively identical; but the Son's will *is* the

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<sup>400</sup> *ComJn* VI.295; XIII.151-3; XIII. 234; *ComMt* XV.10.

<sup>401</sup> *Haer.* II.17.4.



Father's will hypostatically subsisting because the Son does the complete will of the Father. In this manner, the language of the Son as image provides a perfectly balanced *via media* between Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism.

C. Implementing principle 2b: *tanquam splendor a luce*

The second condition that follows from the rejection of Valentinian *probolē* is co-temporaneity. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Irenaeus' analysis on this theme is somewhat unclear. He asserts that if God is simple, then what is generated from him – *qua* substance – cannot stand in a relative temporal ordering with respect to their source. For Irenaeus, this point suffices to reject Valentinian protology wherein a precise ordering is postulated between the generated Aeons based on number symbolism. In Origen, we shall encounter a more precise implementation of co-temporaneity because as I shall now show, Origen developed this condition into an anti-Monarchian point: the Son was generated from the Father eternally, thus clearly possessing individual subsistence from eternity. Consequently, while co-temporaneity remains an implication of simplicity on the grammar of generation, in Origen this condition has acquired an additional anti-Monarchian emphasis.

Like Irenaeus, Origen resorts to light imagery to develop his understanding of co-temporaneity between generator and generated. Origen's exact language comes from Heb 1.3 and Wis 7.25-26. For Origen, the Son is 'the brightness of God's glory' and 'the brightness of eternal light'. Origen utilises the language of 'brightness' to account for the co-temporaneity between the Father and Son. This language, for him, secures the fact that the Son is eternally generated from the Father: 'this is the eternal and everlasting begetting, as brightness is begotten from light'.<sup>402</sup> Further on in *PArch* I.2.7, Origen remarks that "God is light", according to John. The only-begotten Son...is the brightness of this light, *proceeding from God without separation*, as brightness from light, and lightening the whole creation.<sup>403</sup> As expected from how light imagery functions in Irenaeus, Origen's language of the Son's generation *tanquam splendor a luce* serves as an anti-Valentinian emphasis to preserve the simplicity of the Father. This language implements co-temporaneity between Father and Son in order to rule out Valentinian *probolē* which brings a separation between the two.

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<sup>402</sup> *PArch* I.2.4.

<sup>403</sup> *PArch* I.2.7: *Deus lex est secundum Iohannem. Splendor ergo huius lucis est unigenitus filius, ex ipso inseparabiliter velut sepensor ex luce procedens et inluminans universam creaturam.* (italics mine).

But what, according to Origen, is the nature of the Son's co-temporaneity with the Father? In *PArch* I.2.11, we are presented with a detailed explanation when Origen examines the phrase 'brightness of the eternal light' in Wis. 7.25-26:

The term everlasting or eternal properly denotes that which had no beginning of existence and can never cease to be what it is. This is the idea underlying the passage in John, where he says that "God is light". Now God's wisdom is the brightness of that light, not only in so far as it is light, but in so far as it is everlasting light. His wisdom is therefore an everlasting brightness, enduring eternally. If this point is fully understood, it is a clear proof that the Son's existence springs from the Father himself, yet not in time, nor from any other beginning except, as we have said, from God himself.

Sempiternum vel aeternum proprie dicitur quod neque initium ut esset habuit, neque cessare umquam potest esse quod est. Hoc autem designatur apud Iohannem, cum dicit quoniam *Deus lux est*. Splendor autem lucis eius sapientia sua est, non solum secundum quod lux est, sed et secundum id, quod sempiterna lux est, ita ut aeternus et aeternitatis splendor sit sapientia sua. Quod si integre intellegatur, manifeste declarat quia subsistentia filii ab ipso patre descendit, sed non temporaliter neque ab ullo alio initio nisi, ut diximus, ab ipso deo.

At this point, we have arrived at one of the most contentious sections of Rufinus' translation of Origen's text. As Tzamalikos has shown, Rufinus' translation is generally unreliable when it comes to temporal language in Origen.<sup>404</sup> So we will need to rely on one crucial extant Greek text that will secure a baseline understanding of Origen's account of eternal generation based on light imagery. In *HomJe* IX.4, Origen states that 'the Father has not begotten the Son and then severed him from his generation, but always begets him' (οὐχὶ ἐγέννησεν ὁ πατήρ τὸν υἱὸν καὶ ἀπέλυσεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατήρ ἀπὸ τῆς γενέσεως αὐτοῦ, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ γεννᾷ αὐτὸν). Here, he contrasts the present tense of the verb γεννάω with the aorist tense of the same verb, a theological move that he reproduces a few lines later:

But let us consider who is our Savior: a reflection of glory. The reflection of glory has not been begotten just once and no longer begotten (τὸ ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης οὐχὶ ἅπαξ γεγέννηται καὶ οὐχὶ γεννᾶται). But just as the light is an agent of reflection, in

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<sup>404</sup> Tzamalikos, *Origen*, 10–2. For specific points where Tzamalikos points out the issues in Rufinus' translation, see the entries on Rufinus in the index.

such a way the reflection of the glory of God is begotten. Our Savior is the wisdom of God. But the wisdom is the reflection of everlasting light...the Savior is always begotten (ὁ σωτὴρ ἀεὶ γεννᾶται) – because of this he also says, “Before all the hills he begets me”, (and not, “Before all the hills he has begotten me (γεγέννηκεν),” but, “Before all of the hills he begets (γεννᾷ) me”) – and the Savior is always begotten by the Father (καὶ ἀεὶ γεννᾶται ὁ σωτὴρ ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς)

This passage is relevant for understanding *PArch* I.2 because Origen explicitly comments on the meaning of relevant phrases in Heb 1.3 and Wis 7.25-26. According to Origen, this ‘brightness’ in Heb. 1.3 is not begotten once and then no longer begotten because just as light begets brightness in a co-temporal manner, in the same way the Son is begotten from the Father. Origen’s argument in this passage reveals that his understanding of light imagery is similar to what we have seen in Irenaeus. For Origen, light is by nature ceaselessly reflected by its brightness. As a result, the language of generation *tanquam splendor a luce* captured well when something is generated in a co-temporal manner with its source. This is why for Origen, the language of brightness in Heb. 1.3 and Wis. 7.25-26 provides a helpful imagery to account for the co-temporaneity of the Son and the Father. The contrast between the present and pluperfect tenses simply provides a more precisely elaboration of co-temporeneity. The Father (e.g. the light source) always begets the Son (e.g. the brightness) in the present tense, meaning that the Father never ceases (in time) to beget the Son. The implication of the present tense stands in contrast by the use of the pluperfect tense which implies that the Father had begotten the Son at one point in time, and *subsequently* ceased to beget the Son at a later point in time. Thus eternal generation implies that the Father *always* (ἀεὶ) begets the Son without ceasing. Consequently, the Son’s begetting has no beginning in time.<sup>405</sup>

What was the polemical purpose of this doctrine? Origen did not mention the Valentinian emission of the Aeons in *PArch* I.2. While we have seen that Origen recognises co-temporaneity as a principle that rules out Valentinian *probolē*,<sup>406</sup> unlike Irenaeus Origen did not consider co-

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<sup>405</sup> On this point, see also *ComJn* I.204. For Origen, it is inappropriate to use the verb ‘come to be’ to describe the Son’s being ‘in the beginning’ (cf. Wisdom) and his being *with* the Father (Jn 1.1). Rather, John uses the verb ἦν in his Gospel in order to indicate that ‘he [the Son-Logos] does not come to be “in the beginning” from not being “in the beginning”, nor does he pass from not being “with God” to coming to be “with God,” for before all time and eternity “the Word was in the beginning,” and “the Word was with God.”’ (*ComJn* II.9) This stands in contrast with ‘Life’ (Jn I.4), ‘which comes into existence after the Word.’ (*ComJn* II.129) This is clarified by the fact that Life ‘was made’ in the Word (*ComJn* II.130-1). For Origen, Jn 1.4 describes a logical ordering between ‘Life’ and ‘Word’ that does not exist between ‘Word’ and ‘in the beginning’, as well as between ‘Word’ and ‘with God’.

<sup>406</sup> *PArch* I.2.7.

temporaneity directly as an anti-Valentinian emphasis. However, I suggest that he may actually have the Monarchians in mind. The Monarchians taught that the Son does not possess individual subsistence due to the fact that they reject the pre-existence of the divine Son of god *before* (temporally) the Incarnation.<sup>407</sup> Consequently, in Monarchian theology, the procession of the Word in Creation (cf. Prov 8.22-25, Ps 45.1, Jn. 1.3-5) refers not to an eternal generation of the divine Son endowed with individual subsistence, but rather to a Stoic λόγος προφορικός – an uttered word that like sound or voice fades away. The Son of God came to be, as far as the Monarchians are concerned, at the time of the Incarnation when God’s spirit (e.g. the Father himself) indwells the flesh of the man Jesus.<sup>408</sup> It becomes immediately clear that two things in the Monarchian account stand in direct opposition to eternal generation: (1) there was no individual subsistence of any divine Son before the Incarnation, (2) there was a time when the Son of God ‘came to be’, thus implying that there was a time when the Son was not, or that the Son had a temporal origin in time. If this reconstruction of Monarchian logic is correct, then Origen’s emphasis on eternal generation and the phrase ‘there was not a time when he was not’ could be traced back to his anti-Monarchian polemic.<sup>409</sup> Origen’s affirmation of eternal generation could be read as an attempt to secure the individual subsistence of the pre-existent Son (refuting (1)), who is without any temporal origin (refuting (2)). While this hypothesis is somewhat conjectural, I suggest it is nevertheless a highly plausible reading of *PArch* I.2 given the explicit anti-Monarchian undertones in *PArch* I.2 and indeed throughout Origen’s corpus. Taking into account Origen’s stated problematic for *PArch* I.2.5-13, I suggest that Origen developed the co-temporaneity condition required by divine simplicity into a fully anti-Monarchian account of eternal generation, thus securing a *via media* between Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism.

## CONCLUSION

In Irenaeus, we have seen that divine simplicity brings certain requirements to the grammar of generation. Whenever a theologian in this period is engaged in polemic against Valentinian *probolē*, these requirements become important because they enable one to sketch out a

<sup>407</sup> ‘...all monarchians, i.e. modalists as well as adoptionists...have seen “the ‘Son’ only in the historical Christ.” Heine, “The Christology of Callistus,” 71.

<sup>408</sup> Heine, “The Christology of Callistus,” 66–8.

<sup>409</sup> We find this formula in *ComRm* I.5.1, *PArch* IV.4.1. One of the biggest question concerning Origen’s theology remains whether he did in fact place theological weight on this expression which clearly teaches the opposite of what we find in Arius. In my view, the conjecture sets out here could potentially lead to new resolution on this question (and whether there was indeed any Arians *ante litteram* already in the third century opposed by Origen, as postulated by Orbe in Orbe, *Hacia I/1*, 1:398–407.) by treating the identity of ‘Arian-like’ opponents of Origen as Monarchians. But it is beyond the scope of this study to develop this point.

contrasting account of generation vis-à-vis the polemical portrayal of *probolē* as materialistic and anthropomorphic. As I have argued, Origen was engaged in anti-Valentinian polemic in *PArch* I.2, which explains why his account of the Son's generation in this chapter continues to be concerned with the Irenaeian principles of unity. However, as I have argued throughout this chapter, *PArch* I.2 was written within a more crowded polemical landscape than Book 2 of Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*. This is because the additional concern with Monarchianism is in play. As we have seen in this chapter, Origen's anti-Monarchian concern to maintain the Son's distinct hypostatic existence leads him to develop the requirements of simplicity in directions one would not expect from a one-dimensional polemic against Valentinian *probolē*. Thus in Origen, divine simplicity functions broadly as an anti-Valentinian principle of unity between Father and Son, albeit now this function is situated within a wider attempt to find a *via media* between Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism.

I raised the following questions at the end of Chapter 4: Is it possible to maintain the anti-Valentinian emphasis on the Son's continuity with the Father's nature (refuting Valentinian *probolē*), without falling into the Monarchian position that the Son and the Father are one and the same divine acting subject? Is it possible to maintain the anti-Monarchian emphasis on the Son's non-identity with the Father (such that there are two divine acting subjects in Scripture), without introducing Valentinian *probolē* that divide the Father? In this chapter, we have reviewed Origen's *via media*. First, the Son is generated from the Father *tanquam a mente voluntas*. The Son acquires a hypostatic existence without dividing the Father due to the mystery of the Father's will. Second, the Son is the perfect image who mirrors the Father in act and will. As such, the Son neither divides the Father nor is he identified with the Father naïvely. Rather, the Son is distinct from the Father as image is distinguished from its original. But the Son does the perfect will of the Father so that his will (the image) and the Father's will (the original) are indistinguishable on the basis of the harmony between the two. Finally, the Son is generated from the Father *tanquam splendor a luce*. The Father always begets the Son and his begetting never ceases. Consequently, the Son always exists with the Father and never came to be. Putting these themes together, Origen's account of the Father-Son relation in *PArch* I.2 implements the Irenaeian principles required by divine simplicity, while maintaining an anti-Monarchian emphasis throughout.

We have thus reached the surprising conclusion concerning the function of divine simplicity in Origen's *via media*. On the one hand, it serves as a principle of differentiation between the Father and Son. For Origen, the Father is the absolutely simple divinity, whereas the Son is the mediator who is divine by participating in the Father. The Son is multiple because of

his unique economic role in taking on relative soteriological titles. Consequently, divine simplicity provides an anti-Monarchian strategy to differentiate the Father and the Son κατ' οἰκονομίαν. On the other hand, divine simplicity also serves as a principle of unity between the Father and Son. For Origen, the Father generates the Son who is inseparable, consubstantial in act, and co-temporal with himself. This account of the Son's generation thus satisfies the conditions required to be compatible with the Father's simplicity. As we have seen in Irenaeus, divine simplicity as a principle of unity is primarily an anti-Valentinian strategy designed to rule out materialistic *probolē*. Nevertheless, as we have seen in this chapter, Origen develops this strategy in a way that takes into account his anti-Monarchian concerns as well so that the Son's distinct and eternal pre-existence is preserved.

## CONCLUSION

Divine simplicity emerged as a ‘pattern for theology’ that attempts to rule out inappropriate anthropomorphic notions of God. In the second century Apologists, who were drawing on the language of non-composition so clearly set out in the *Phaedo*, divine simplicity first became a useful tool in Christian theology for regulating theological discourse about God. As we have seen in Justin and Athenagoras, simplicity could function as a ‘grammatical’ rule within theological contexts that differ vastly from each other. What seems clear is that the language of non-composition best allows divine simplicity to serve as a ‘grammatical’ rule. As a result, it is likely that divine simplicity first emerged in the Apologists as a purely metaphysical doctrine.

However, a richer interpretation of divine simplicity was also possible in the ante-Nicene period, as we have seen. In the *Republic*, Plato had already opened up this possibility to understand the metaphysical and ethical sense of simplicity as radically one: the God whose nature is perfectly incorruptible is also the God whose character is perfectly self-consistent, without internal contradictions and free from deceptions. This trajectory of interpretation allows a richer understanding of divine simplicity without a radical disjunction between the two senses of simplicity. I have argued that Origen’s understanding of divine simplicity is best situated along this trajectory. According to Origen, divine simplicity implies that God’s nature is free from material composition that would violate his self-sameness: God is a purely intellectual existence. However, divine simplicity also implies that God is one in that he is perfectly self-consistent: ‘God...never becomes another than himself, that is, he is never changed, never turned into something else, just as David proclaims concerning him, saying: ‘But you are always the same, and your years shall never fail.’ (Ps 102.27).<sup>410</sup> For Origen, these two senses of simplicity are intimately connected because according to Origen, ‘no material or bodily thing is single in the sense of one [e.g. ethically one, as we have seen in chapter 2]: but every one of them, though reckoned single, is split up and cut in pieces and divided into several parts, having lost its unity’.<sup>411</sup> In other words, what is simple metaphysically is also what is simple ethically. Origen’s theology demonstrates that the rich understanding of divine simplicity as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis was indeed part of ante-Nicene discourse. Thus I have suggested that in the ante-

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<sup>410</sup> *Hom1S* I.4.

<sup>411</sup> *PEuch.* XXI.2.

Nicene period, at least two possible interpretations of divine simplicity were available: (a) as a purely metaphysical doctrine of non-composition, (b) as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis.

Given that God is simple, what are the implications of this doctrine for Trinitarian theology? In the ante-Nicene period, divine simplicity acquired a 'grammatical' function primarily through the restricted question on the Father-Son relation. As we have seen in Irenaeus, Valentinian emission (*probole*) was considered dangerous because the language suggests an anthropomorphic model of generation that violates divine simplicity. In response, Irenaeus argued that generation compatible with divine simplicity must satisfy two principles of unity. First, the manner of generation must not lead to separation between the generator and the generated. Secondly, the relation between generator and generated must satisfy the conditions of consubstantiality and co-temporaneity. I have argued that these anti-Valentinian polemics opened up the possibility for divine simplicity to acquire a Trinitarian function, namely, to regulate theological accounts of the Son's generation. But these anti-Valentinian principles might lead to a potential incompatibility with an anti-Monarchian emphasis on the Son's distinction from the Father. The Monarchians, stressing monotheism, postulated that the Father must be identical to the divine Son of God. They developed a hermeneutical framework on this basis that sought to make sense of Scripture on the assumption that it can only have one divine acting and speaking subject. In contrast to this framework, anti-Monarchians like Tertullian stressed the distinct existence of the Son because they argued that the presupposition of two distinct divine subjects provided a better framework to make sense of the whole of Scripture. Anti-Monarchians, however, faced a potential objection that was recognised by Tertullian: would the anti-Monarchian emphasis on the Son's distinct existence lead to a form of Valentinian *probole* that introduces divisions between the Father and Son? While this question was not explored in terms of divine simplicity by Tertullian, it poses a potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and anti-Monarchianism. If, on the one hand, anti-Monarchianism leads to Valentinian *probole*, then it violates divine simplicity. If, on the other hand, divine simplicity rules out Valentinian *probole*, then it could also rule out the anti-Monarchian affirmation of the son's distinct existence as well. This latter possibility raises a potential incompatibility between simplicity and the Father-Son distinction. The crucial question, however, is this: is it possible to find a *via media* between Valentinian *probole* and Monarchianism?

The genius of Origen, as I have argued, is found precisely in that he conceived such a *via media*. Further, what is remarkable yet surprising is that in finding the *via media*, Origen utilised divine simplicity in both an anti-Monarchian and an anti-Valentinian capacity. Consequently,



Origen used divine simplicity to *differentiate* the Father from the Son, as well as to *unite* the Father with the Son. As we saw in Chapter 5, for Origen the Son is to be differentiated from the Father on the grounds of Mk 10.18, Jn 14.28 and other passages. The Father is greater than the Son (Jn 14.28) because the Father is the absolutely simple divinity. He is the source and form of divinity. As such, he is *the* God and the *only true* God (Jn 17.3). The Son, however, is multiple and not simple because he possesses multiple relative soteriological titles that are unique to him. Simplicity used in this way serves an anti-Monarchian emphasis to differentiate the Father and Son as two distinct divine subjects in the salvific economy revealed in Scripture: the Father is the source and origin of all things, the Son the mediator between the Father and all things. But in addition, as we saw in Chapter 6, Origen conceived the Son's generation from the Father in a manner consistent with the anti-Valentinian principles of unity required by Irenaeus. The simple Father can only generate a Son who neither is a separate existence from him, nor possesses a contradictory nature from him. Origen conceived the mystery of the Son's generation *tanquam a mente voluntas*. According to this process, the Son is the Father's act of will acquiring hypostatic existence for itself, yet without causing divisions to the Father. Begotten as such, the Son is perfectly one with the Father – 'consubstantial' in this sense – in that the Son does the complete will of the Father as a perfect image that mirrors the act and movement of the original. Utilising the notion of image, Origen conceived the 'consubstantiality' between the Father and Son as perfect harmony in act and will. Further, through the notion of eternal generation, Origen maintained that the Son and the Father are co-temporal. There was never a time when the Father is without the Son because the Father always *begets* – in the present tense – the Son. Eternal generation enabled Origen to preserve the pre-existence of the divine Son against the Monarchian's Stoic account of the procession of the Word based on Ps 45.1. Thus in setting out this account of the Son's generation, Origen was able, not only to preserve the anti-Valentinian principles of unity required by divine simplicity, but also to preserve these principles alongside his anti-Monarchianism. As a result, in Origen, both functions of divine simplicity are integrated into a coherent Trinitarian framework which maintains anti-Monarchian and anti-Valentinian emphases alongside each other.

This state of affairs, I submit, is the distinctive shape of the *status quaestionis* in ante-Nicene theology concerning the simple Trinity. While this analysis remains open to further scrutiny, I suggest that it offers a fresh perspective on the state of Trinitarian theology up to and including Origen. Given that we were not able to examine the post-Origenian sources in this study, here I shall offer a brief sketch of the *status quaestionis* after Origen. In the post-Origenian context, the theological landscape had changed. The tight integration of the two functions of

simplicity in Origen's Trinitarian theology began to fall apart. The anti-Monarchian function is the contentious one. Some, like Arius, emphasised the Father as indicating his transcendence over the Son in a more radical way than Origen probably would allow.<sup>412</sup> Others, like Alexander or Athanasius, emphasised the Father and the Son as equal,<sup>413</sup> thus drifting towards the complete dissolution of the Origenian point that the Father, as the absolute simple source of divinity, is greater than the Son who is the derived image of the Father. As we have seen, both trajectories are problematic from the viewpoint of Origenian theology. The second trajectory is problematic because it disrupts the anti-Monarchian component of Origen's synthesis. Origen construes monotheism as the idea that there is only one purely simple source of divinity – the Father himself. This is how Origen refutes the Monarchian objection that he has fallen into polytheism. It is then clear why some – like Arius – might find the move in Alexander and Athanasius problematic: the second trajectory threatens to compromise monotheism (construed in the Origenian manner). But the first trajectory is also problematic because the understanding of the Son as the perfect image of the Father in act and will is already at breaking point when it comes to maintaining both the anti-Monarchian emphasis on the transcendence of the Father and the anti-Valentinian requirements on the Son's generation together. Any further radical emphasis on the transcendence of the Father over the Son will risk disrupting the balance, leading us straight back towards Valentinian *probolē* where the Father is said to generate that which is (a) separated from himself, (b) contrary in nature with himself, and (c) related to himself in a relative temporal order. It is then also clear why many might find the 'Arian' position problematic: the first trajectory threatens to violate the required continuity between the Father and the Son, thus bringing back Valentinian *probolē*. It is true that later controversies arose through many other factors, theological and non-theological. But the function of divine simplicity as a principle of differentiation between the Father and the Son – originally a straight-forwardly anti-Monarchian emphasis – has certainly acquired a polemical overtone after Origen. However, on the other hand, the anti-Valentinian function of divine simplicity – its requirements of the Son's generation – was almost universally accepted by later theologians. Theologians from Arius to Athanasius, Eusebius of Caesarea to Gregory of Thaumaturgus, all maintained the anti-Valentinian point as crucial to Trinitarian theology.<sup>414</sup> Thus while the anti-Monarchian function of simplicity became contentious at the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century, the anti-Valentinian

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<sup>412</sup> For example, see Williams, *Arius*, 101–3 especially S1-4, 15-20, 25-30, 40-1.

<sup>413</sup> Alexander of Alexandria: *Urk.* 4a (14); Athanasius: *Syn.* 34-5.

<sup>414</sup> Arius: *Urk.* 1, *Urk.* 6; Athanasius: *Decr.* 11, *CAr.* I.28, *Syn.* 52; Eusebius: *DE* IV.3, V.1, *ET* I.6.1-5, II.14.3-8; Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Phil.* 6-8.

function remained indisputable. This is the rough state of the fate of divine simplicity in Trinitarian theology after Origen.

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As I stated at the beginning, the ante-Nicene period raises significant questions for both patristic specialists who are interested in the development of divine simplicity in patristic Trinitarian theology, and modern theologians who are engaged in current critical debates on the simple Trinity. To end, I shall briefly highlight these questions for both groups of scholars.

For patristic specialists, I argued that we need to understand the centrality of divine simplicity for fourth century Trinitarian discourse in light of ante-Nicene developments. However, what this study has shown perhaps accentuates the discontinuity more than the continuity between the ante-Nicene and post-Nicene *status quaestionis* concerning the simple Trinity. As is well known, in post-Nicene theology, what is simple is the divine essence (*ousia*) shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>415</sup> In Origen, however, it is only the Father who is simple. This constitutes a major difference between the Trinitarian function of divine simplicity in Origen's ante-Nicene theology and the same in post-Nicene theologians such as Augustine or Basil. How do we account for this transition? Might we explain this difference in light of the shift in doctrinal-polemical contexts? In Origen, the central Trinitarian contexts were Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism. But did these contexts remain central in the fourth century? If shifting doctrinal-polemical contexts indeed contributed to the transition, how do we in our historiography shift our doctrinal categories from the third-century ante-Nicene ones (e.g. Valentinian *probolē* and Monarchianism) to the fourth century ones ('Arian', 'Eunomian', etc.) so that we may account for this transition? This study has established that there was indeed a 'grammatical' role for divine simplicity to play in ante-Nicene Trinitarian discourse. However, the nature of the transition from the ante-Nicene to the post-Nicene *status quaestionis* remains to be elucidated further. Thus the key question raised by this study for future exploration in patristic studies is this: how did divine simplicity change from being attributed to the Father to being attributed to the divine essence (*ousia*)? If my narrative on post-Origenian theology offered above

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<sup>415</sup> In *Eum.* I.7, Basil seems to contradict Origen's discussion in *ComJn* I.119: 'Though our Lord is one in substance, and one substance, simple and not composite, he calls himself by different names at different times, using designations that differ from one another for the different conceptualizations.' For Origen, the different names make the Son multiple and not simple, thus differentiating him from the Father. Basil also affirms the simplicity of the Son in *Eum.* I.23. Moreover, what is simple for Basil is the divine substance/nature (*Eum.* II.29, 32). Similarly, for Augustine, it is the nature of the Trinity that is simple. See *Civ.* XI.10.

is on the right track, a better understanding of this question would no doubt also provide a significant vantage point to narrate the transition from Origen to the fourth century Trinitarian debates.

For modern theologians, I suggest that the ante-Nicene *status quaestionis* raises plenty of substantial points for further theological reflection. I shall highlight two significant issues. First, as I have argued, it is possible to understand divine simplicity as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis in early Christian theology. This possibility is hitherto unexplored in contemporary discussions, perhaps due to an accentuated disjunction between metaphysical and ethical doctrines of God since the nineteenth century. Yet as I have argued, in its richest ancient formulation, divine simplicity was understood without posing a sharp disjunction between God's nature and his act. Further explorations on divine simplicity as a metaphysical-ethical synthesis might advance contemporary debates, especially for reinstating the theological integrity of divine simplicity in modern theology.

Second, the ante-Nicene *status quaestionis* reveals that modern analysis of the potential incompatibilities between divine simplicity and Trinitarian theology is simplistic. As I have shown, divine simplicity does not entail modalist-Monarchianism, at least not in any obvious sense. The analysis offered in modern theology today makes little sense in light of the historic modalist-Monarchianism found in the second and third centuries. This is because modalist-Monarchianism cannot be treated just as a straight-forward thesis about logical identity. This study thus challenges modern theologians to pay closer attention to the historical details of modalist-Monarchianism in future analysis on the relationship between divine simplicity and modalism. This criticism notwithstanding, this study also opens up a new way for contemporary theologians to pursue the question on the potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and the affirmation of Trinitarian distinctions: what is the implication of divine simplicity for the Son's generation? This question has yet to receive substantial treatments in contemporary debates. But as I have demonstrated, the question on the nature of the Son's generation is the most likely location in which patristic theologians first recognised a potential incompatibility between divine simplicity and the anti-modalist emphasis on the Father-Son distinction. As a result, I suggest that the implications of divine simplicity for the Son's generation may provide a fruitful site for further reflections.

This study has by no means exhausted the depth and richness of the *status quaestionis* in ante-Nicene theology on the simple Trinity. Notable absentees (Philo of Alexandria, Alcinous, Numenius of Apamea, Clement of Alexandria, etc.) suggest that this study has not addressed the

complex interaction between the doctrinal-polemical background (Valentinian *probole*/Monarchianism) that motivated the use of simplicity in ante-Nicene theology, and the development of Middle-Platonism. Moreover, Plotinus and the Latin patristic tradition have fallen outside of the scope of this study. Nevertheless, this study has attempted to offer a degree of clarity on the ante-Nicene *status quaestionis* that is hitherto unavailable. In light of the background examined in this study, the doctrine contained in St. Augustine's statement – *Et haec trinitas unus est Deus; nec ideo non simplex, quia trinitas*<sup>416</sup> – might appear just a bit more comprehensible for us today.

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<sup>416</sup> *Civ.* XI.10.

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